Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama

Porter, Chloe

Published by Manchester University Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/64120

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2279553

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* presents one of the most famous depictions of a patron of the visual arts in early modern English drama. In the penultimate scene of the play, we are told that the Sicilian courtier, Paulina, is in possession of a ‘statue’ of the dead Sicilian queen, Hermione (5.2.93). ‘Hearing of her mother’s statue’, Perdita, Hermione’s long-lost daughter, and the Sicilian king, Leontes, repair to the ‘removed house’ where it is kept (5.2.92–105). Sixteen years previously, Leontes caused his wife’s death, accusing her of adultery with the Bohemian king, Polixenes, and rejecting his own paternity of Perdita, who as a baby is abandoned in Bohemia. In the final scene of the play, Paulina pulls back a curtain to reveal what seems to be a disarmingly lifelike statue depicting Hermione. Now penitent and reunited with his daughter, Leontes is encouraged by Paulina to ‘awake … faith’ in the possibility that the image may be made to ‘move’; the king watches in wonder as the statue is apparently transformed to the living Hermione, ‘stone no more’ (5.3.88–9).

As is often noted, playgoers share Leontes, Perdita and Polixenes’ ‘ignorance’ of what happens during this supposed transformation.¹ In many of Shakespeare’s comedies, spectators are aware that a character has assumed a disguise in order to achieve the resolution of the plot; in *The Winter’s Tale*, however, the theatre audience are not given an explicit warning that Hermione is to appear in the guise of a statue.² There are hints that a woman ‘as like as Hermione as is her picture’ may appear in the play, but these contribute to intrigue rather than to certain knowledge about how Hermione has ‘stolen from the dead’ (5.1.74, 5.3.114). This uncertainty continues after the supposed transformation, as Hermione explains that she has ‘preserved’ herself to ‘see’ Perdita, her ‘issue’ (5.3.127–8). This explanation indicates that Hermione has been alive for the past sixteen years, but at the same time directly contradicts the report of the queen’s death offered by Paulina at the end of Act 3 scene 2.³ Paulina tells Hermione that there’s ‘time enough’ for a full explanation of the queen’s mysterious ‘preservation’, and Leontes gestures ‘hence’ towards a future time, ‘where we may leisurely / Each one demand and answer his part’ (5.3.128–53).⁴ Indefinitely deferring answers to the questions generated by the bewildering spectacle
of Hermione’s image, Shakespeare recognises that ‘the idea of satisfaction is more seductive and, paradoxically, more satisfactory, than the thing itself’. The aesthetic force of this scene is therefore invested in a resistance to closure that centres on spectators’ incomplete understanding of the supposed statue of which Paulina is patron. Certainly, the open-endedness of the ‘statue scene’ has proved irresistible for critics of *The Winter’s Tale*, and is often positioned as the summit of Shakespeare’s thought on aesthetic and sensory experience. Given the prominence of this highly ambiguous depiction of patronage of the visual arts in Shakespeare studies, it is worth considering the tenor and implications of criticism on this play in more detail.

Studies of *The Winter’s Tale* cover a diversity of aesthetic, formal, social, theological and ethical concerns, but most critics share an attraction to the ‘statue scene’ as the site of the endorsement of the ‘unknown’ and ‘unknowability’. The metatheatrical consolidation of audience viewpoint with the perspectives of Leontes, Perdita and Polixenes is important for these critical readings, which usually position playgoers as encouraged to embrace the unknown along with the play-world spectators. Michael O’Connell, for example, suggests that Shakespeare ‘presses an audience into idolatry as it assents with Leontes to whatever reality the apparent statue may mysteriously possess’. It is often noted that the ‘statue scene’ is steeped in Catholic iconography, as Perdita and the penitent Leontes worship the statue of a maternal figure in a secluded chapel, and the statue transforms to flesh in a musical, ritualised ceremony. The revelation that Hermione may have ‘preserved’ herself throughout the drama, however, is also sometimes taken as an undercutting of this Catholic iconography, or a moment of breakage in Shakespeare’s engagement with Reformation debates about religious spectacle. Marion O’Connor suggests that the play detaches from ‘iconomachic’ debates at the moment at which ‘the figure of Hermione is no longer perceived as an image but recognised as a human being’. Prior to this moment, the ‘figure’ of Hermione ‘signified something other, and more enduring, than the stone of a statue or the flesh of a human being’. Significantly, O’Connor considers this transition from unknowable otherness to familiar ‘living’ warmth as a part of the play’s exploration of the unreliability of words and images, and Shakespeare’s refusal to validate ‘Reformed logocentrism’. Recalling the optimism of critics invested in the notion of the ‘speaking picture’, O’Connor concludes that this rejection of Reformation iconomachy reflects a broader Shakespearean openness to ‘collaboration’ rather than ‘contest’ between words and images. Although she does not consider the question of Hermione’s statue to be particularly open-ended, then, O’Connor connects the play’s investment in the indecipherability of ‘signs’ with a flexible, open-minded approach to Reformation image controversy. In this conviction in Shakespeare’s flexible approach to religious debate, O’Connor’s analysis reflects the view adopted by a number of critics concerned with religious contexts and more convinced of
the open-endedness of the ‘statue scene’. For Richard Wilson, the ‘systematic ambiguity’ of the final scene reflects a cultural openness to incertitude that makes ‘Shakespeare’s audience ready … for the future Church of England’. For Richard Wilson, the ‘systematic ambiguity’ of the final scene reflects a cultural openness to incertitude that makes ‘Shakespeare’s audience ready … for the future Church of England’. Phebe Jensen, meanwhile, argues that this undercutting of pre-Reformation iconography is not an iconoclastic rejection of Catholicism, but ‘allows for different responses from a devotionally diverse audience that held varied opinions about whether praying to painted statues was idolatrous’. In these readings of the play, the bewildering ambiguities attendant on the image of Hermione are reflective and evocative of the climate of uncertainty that characterised early modern English religious culture.

Elsewhere, the ‘unknowability’ of Hermione’s image is a source of ‘wonder’ that has radical implications for spectators’ ontological experience. T. G. Bishop, for example, equates watching Hermione’s supposed transformation with a ‘sudden waving of the barriers of self-knowledge’ that constitutes an ‘experience of “wonder”’, spectators wishing Hermione into being and in the process realising ‘something about themselves, about their own desires’. That the ‘statue scene’ is in some way aesthetically transcendental also shapes Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin’s discussion of the play. Dawson and Yachnin disagree regarding the cultural contexts for the ‘sublimity’ of Hermione’s supposed transformation, but both state that in this scene ‘visual pleasure … looks beyond itself’. What is most interesting about Dawson and Yachnin’s allusion to visual experience that goes ‘beyond itself’ is that these critics write from historicising and ‘neo-Marxist’ perspectives that might not be readily associated with investment in aesthetic transcendentalism. Part of the appeal of the ‘statue scene’, however, is that its gesturing towards an unknown ‘beyond’ its own formal limits functions meaningfully across critical and methodological boundaries. The idea that the ‘statue scene’ gestures towards something ‘beyond itself’ is, for example, very useful in deconstructive readings of The Winter’s Tale. In an important discussion of the play from this perspective, Howard Felperin argues that in the final scene we are encouraged, with Leontes, to ‘relax and enjoy’ the ‘inescapable mediacy of language’. Building on Felperin’s analysis, John J. Joughin is even able to dislocate the ‘unknowability’ of Hermione’s image from a transcendentalism implicated in notions of formal unity. Joughin suggests that the image of Hermione ‘undoes attempts to unify meaning’, and so ‘is certainly not the unifyingly fulfilling or unreflectively transcendental category of the aesthetic caricatured and maligned by so much early “radical” cultural criticism’. Repeatedly, the association between Hermione and incomprehension generates meaning for critics working across a range of contrasting concerns.

Even discussions of The Winter’s Tale sceptical about the value of the play’s ‘open-endedness’ are heavily invested in the unknowable otherness of the ‘Hermione’ that appears to turn from stone to flesh. Taking Felperin’s reading of the play as a starting point, James A. Knapp aims to show that the
encounter with Hermione’s incomprehensible image places an ethical demand for a ‘response’ on spectators. In this view, the open-endedness of the final scene demands action on the part of spectators rather than encouraging the relaxed celebration of the ‘inescapable mediacy of language’. Knapp argues that Leontes’s awakening of faith in the image of Hermione recognises the ‘unknown’ and ‘unknowable’ as ‘other’ and thus constitutes an ethical choice in the sense recommended by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas defines ethics as a recognition of the ‘other’ that enables the rejection of ‘sovereign reason’ that ‘knows only itself; as Knapp points out, the ‘other’ in this sense refers to ‘the other person, designated “other”’ as well as ‘the utterly other, designated “Other” – the other as other, conceptually equivalent to God’. This view posits Hermione as a bewildering, almost incomprehensible figure of divine, thus immaterial, and yet gendered, material otherness. Building on Knapp’s work, Renuka Gusain finds Hermione’s image redolent of a Levinian ‘Other’ that ‘grounds’ Being through its unknowability, and is equivalent in its alterity to early modern theological concepts of grace and Neoplatonic notions of beauty. Taking Leontes’s tyrannical rejection of Hermione in the early stages of the play as a violent reaction against beauty, Gusain suggests that Paulina, acting as a ‘playwright-artist-courtier figure’ presents the transformation of the statue as ‘a solution to the problem of responding to the Otherness of beauty without doing violence to it’. Such violence would ‘disrupt’ the divine ‘Otherness of the beautiful object’, and preclude the ‘awareness of something Other’ that is central to Levinian subject-formation. As in T. G. Bishop’s exploration of the ‘wonder’ of the ‘statue scene’, Gusain presents self-knowledge as dependent on the transcendental ‘strangeness’ of Hermione’s image, which mediates between materiality and immateriality, and is perceived as a violable object that is also ‘inexpressible and unknown’.

Together, these diverse discussions of The Winter’s Tale demonstrate the extent of critical investment in formal ambiguities of the ‘statue scene’ that pivot around the unknown status of Hermione’s image. There is arguably something troubling about this critical preoccupation with tantalising aesthetic effects and meaning as generated by a disarming image of protean, unknowable femininity. Every time we pursue Shakespeare’s ‘meaning’ (or the evasion of meaning) in the unknowability of Hermione’s statue, we are at risk of validating a highly patriarchal narrative in which aesthetic value and form are mediated via the image of the woman-as-other. Moreover, the more we emphasise the extent to which Hermione’s image enables deconstructive resistance to formal ‘finish’ in Shakespeare’s play, the more we invoke the ideal of an aesthetic ‘whole’. In these observations, I build on Barbara Johnson’s incisive discussion of the persistence of concepts of ‘wholeness’ in literary and philosophical discourse even as the aesthetics of modernity emphasises fracture and fragmentation. Engaging with hostility towards mothers articulated in literature and in Freudian and Lacanian
psychoanalysis, Johnson argues that maternal figures are frequently set up as barriers to ‘wholeness’, given the connection between mimetic fracture and sexual difference. The relevance of cultural meanings of motherhood for The Winter’s Tale has already been recognised in a number of studies focusing on Hermione’s maternal body. Significantly, these readings of the play are at times invested in the unknowable, deferred ‘wholeness’ invoked by Hermione’s statue. For example, acknowledging the ‘decidedly patriarchal’ nature of the ‘framework’ within which Shakespeare’s play operates, Janet Adelman nonetheless suggests that The Winter’s Tale presents ‘an astonishing psychic achievement’, in which ‘Shakespeare figures the loss and recovery of the world in the mother’s body, returning to us what we didn’t know that we had lost’. Jensen’s evocation of the play’s ambiguous religious stance, meanwhile, is based in part on a discussion of idolatry and iconoclasm that centres on Leontes’s horrified realisation that he is complicit in a post-lapsarian ‘representational economy’ founded on sexual difference. This realisation flares up through a combination of the sight of Hermione’s heavily pregnant body, and the mention of the moment at which he and Hermione first ‘crossed eyes’ (1.2.79). The latter provocation occurs in a conversation between Polixenes and Hermione in which the former idealises his boyhood friendship with Leontes as a pastoral scene, describing himself and the Sicilian king as ‘twinned lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun’ who ‘knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing’ (1.2.67–70). When Hermione notes that Polixenes refers to an innocence lost, the Bohemian king redefines the innocence he describes as a time prior to his and his friend’s encounters with their future wives (1.2.75–80). Where Leontes and Polixenes, ‘twinned’ as boys, were the mirror image of one another, the introduction of sexual difference disrupts visual unity and collapses Polixenes’ ‘iconic reflection’ (1.2.88). In this way, the sight of Hermione provides a point of mediation through which Leontes negotiates and reconfigures his attitude to representation, eventually rejecting his iconophobic, iconoclastic rage at the referential fracture in order to ‘awake faith’ in images in the ‘statue scene’.

It seems impossible to get past the signifying function of Hermione’s body and its transcendential immersion in patriarchal concepts of ‘unity’, as the play invests critical discourse and audience ‘faith’ in the notion of women as the procreative point of ‘splitting’ from an originary, pre-lapsarian wholeness. As Tara Hamling has shown, early modern audiences would have been familiar with the iconography of this originary wholeness, as decorative schemes and textiles frequently depicted scenes from the creation as told in Genesis. For example, include a series of illustrations of creation scenes, accompanied with extracts from Genesis. One page in the Miscellany shows the emergence of Eve from Adam’s rib, presenting a view of this scene as shown in The Holie Bible of 1568, but which was also copied in various forms in England in decorative schemes and textiles (figures 12–13).
The unknowable image in The Winter’s Tale

12 Thomas Trevilian, ‘Creation of the world: sixth day’, Trevelyon miscellany [manuscript], 1608 (1608) fol. 39v
Making and unmaking in early modern English drama

13 Woodcut showing the creation of Eve, *The Holie Bible* (1568) sig. A3r
Significantly, this scene shows Adam and Eve before the development of sexual difference, Eve emerging in fluid fashion from Adam’s side, with both figures at this point existing as united, semi-formed matter. One-ness in this depiction is notably formless, and it might be argued that we cannot do more as critics than accept Shakespeare’s engagement with historically prevalent, gendered images of unity as aesthetically ‘beyond form’. On the other hand, there is more that can be done critically here. It is arguably intense focus on Hermione as viewed-object that limits critical scope to the repeated assertion of the ‘unknowability’ of her image. By recognising Shakespeare’s interest in the making of that unknowable image, it may be possible to adjust our focus to an extent. Rather than focusing on Hermione’s body as the barrier to unreachable ‘unity’, there is much to be gained from a consideration of Paulina as the patron and therefore co-maker of Hermione’s image. In this view, Paulina becomes the key to Shakespeare’s treatment of mimetic practice in *The Winter’s Tale*. In the next section, therefore, I discuss Paulina as a patron whose role straddles the functions of spectator, consumer of images and participant in the construction of spectacle. The immaterial/material unknowability of Hermione is shown to be traceable to Paulina’s active work in these roles.

**Paulina as patron**

The image of Hermione that is presented in the ‘statue scene’ is described repeatedly as the property of Paulina. The sculpture is a piece ‘in the keeping of Paulina’ in her ‘removed house’; behind a ‘curtain’, in a ‘chapel’, ‘apart’ from a ‘gallery’ of other images owned by the Sicilian courtier (5.2.92–105, 5.3.10–86). Paulina is said to have overseen the production of the statue with care, having ‘privately twice or thrice a day, ever since the death of Hermione’ visited the ‘removed house’ (5.2.103–5). When displaying the supposed sculpture in the final scene, Paulina refers to it as ‘my poor image’, and affirms that ‘the stone is mine’ (5.3.57–8). Despite this evidence of Paulina’s status as a patron of the visual arts, critics have not focused on this significant aspect of her function in the play, although Paulina’s matriarchal agency is frequently acknowledged. Barkan, for example, wonders whether Paulina is Hermione’s ‘protectress – or jailer?’ Stanley Cavell, meanwhile, takes Paulina as the ‘muse’ of the ‘ceremony’ of the play’s final scene, or its ‘stage director’. O’Connor notes that Paulina has a ‘private collection of “many singularities”’, as well as ‘a chapel’ containing ‘a shrine’, but does not dwell on the subject of patronage, instead figuring Paulina ‘as priestess-like promoter of Hermione’s cult’. Others contextualise Paulina in relation to black magic, encouraged by the ritual element of the final scene as well as Leontes’s earlier assertion that Paulina is a ‘mankind witch’ (2.3.66). As mentioned above, Gusain sees Paulina as a hybrid ‘playwright-artist-courtier figure’, where ‘artist figure’ is equivalent
to a conjurer of spectacle, ‘like Prospero in The Tempest’. Lowell Gallagher, meanwhile, notes that Paulina is presented as the ‘owner’ of the statue, and concludes that this means that the image has ‘multiple owners’, since he takes Giulio Romano to also have ‘possession’ of Hermione. Gallagher therefore considers Paulina to be a ‘covert, collaborative author’ of the statue along with Romano. This is an odd conclusion given that Romano is much more ‘covert’ than Paulina in the play in performance, never even appearing onstage. Gallagher’s analysis overlooks the hierarchical details of patron–visual artist relations in the context of early modern patronage, and, in prioritising Romano as an ‘author’ figure, reflects broader critical assumptions about the ‘making’ of Hermione’s image.

Paulina’s status as a consumer of images is arguably often overlooked because of critical interest in the attribution of the statue to Giulio Romano. This attribution is made in a conversation between Paulina’s steward and two Sicilian gentlemen that takes place in the penultimate scene of the drama. Here, the steward explains that Perdita has heard of ‘her mother’s statue’:

> which is in the keeping of Paulina, a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master, Giulio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape. He so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of an answer. (5.2.92–9)

As I noted in the introduction, this is an inaccurate allusion to the sixteenth-century Italian visual arts, since Giulio Romano (1499?–1546) was known as a painter and architect rather than as a sculptor. A number of critics have discussed the identity of Shakespeare’s Romano, often with a focus on the possibility that the playwright was familiar with Giorgio Vasari’s life of Romano in Le Vite De’ Piu Eccellenti Pittori Scultori e Architettori (first published in Italian in 1550, revised and enlarged 1568). This attention to Romano often seems to be at the expense of recognition of Paulina as patron. Julia Reinhard Lupton, for example, suggests the pertinence of Giulio Romano as a point of reference in The Winter’s Tale, since ‘like Paulina’, Vasari’s Romano is ‘a collector of antiquaries’. Similarly, in a later essay on hospitality in The Winter’s Tale, noting that it is Paulina who pronounces Hermione dead in Act 3, Lupton considers Paulina as a ‘coroner turned curator’ who hosts Hermione for sixteen years and oversees the spectacular reunion of the final scene. When considering the aesthetic meaning of the statue scene, however, Lupton transfers the agency of the ‘curator’ from Paulina to Shakespeare’s Romano, who is compared to Antony Gormley, the sculptor, who in 2009 invited members of the public to stand on the empty fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, London. This is an ingenious comparison for what it suggests about Shakespeare and Gormley’s evocation of the aesthetic ‘allure of real life’. By aligning Gormley with Romano, however, Lupton
The unknowable image in The Winter’s Tale

effaces the significance of Paulina as a patron who is materially engaged with the construction and presentation of the statue.

Critical neglect of Paulina’s engagement with visual practice may be attributed partly to the widespread view that early seventeenth-century English visual culture was underdeveloped and therefore offers no ‘real’ sources for the depiction of Paulina as patron. Catherine Belsey, for example, refers to Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel’s pioneering collection of antiquities, assembled between 1612 and 1615, and notes that ‘The Winter’s Tale … precedes by a whisker the fashion Arundel helped to inaugurate’. Following Bruce R. Smith, Belsey suggests that ‘the likely model for Hermione’s statue was tomb sculpture’. This is indeed likely, and enables a reading of Paulina as a patron in the vein of early modern female patrons of the visual arts who were widows or were ‘released from marital responsibilities’, and were of a high social status. Paulina fits this profile; although she is not certain of the death of her husband, the courtier Antigonus, until Act 5, she has lived as a widow throughout much of the timescale of the drama, and swears that he ‘did perish’ in Bohemia before this has been confirmed (5.1.44). Paulina particularly corresponds with elite female patrons who commissioned commemorative images, such as Lady Anne Clifford. Clifford, who died in 1676 and was active as a patron during the mid to late seventeenth century, postdates Shakespeare’s play and is not presented here as a ‘source’ for Paulina-as-patron. Instead, Clifford presents an instructive point of reference in a discussion of female patronage in The Winter’s Tale because, like Paulina, she operated as a matriarchal figure within the patriarchal structures of monumental image-making.

Clifford’s patronage of the visual arts forms a part of a range of self-presentation activities undertaken in relation to a long-standing legal battle over the inheritance of her father’s estates, which had passed to her uncle at her father’s death in 1605. Clifford finally took possession of the estates in 1643, and although she was not able to visit her lands until 1649, she set about ‘an elaborate plan to prove she had been wronged forty years earlier’. For example, Clifford pursued old-fashioned, gothic schemes in her architectural projects in order to create the impression that her buildings were an established part of the landscape. A similar architectural inscribing of the past onto Clifford’s lands was achieved in the monument to her mother that Clifford built in 1656, known as ‘The Countess Pillar’. This memorial pillar was built on the spot at which Clifford last saw her mother in 1616 (figure 14).

Clifford’s use of a phallic structure to mark the loss of her mother indicates the extent to which her activities as a patron exploit patriarchal iconography for matriarchal ends. Similarly, a portrait known as The Great Picture Triptych and commissioned during the 1640s when Clifford was still resident in London, is embellished with inscriptions that detail Clifford’s family history so as to legitimise her inheritance claims (figure 15). Two versions of this
portrait were commissioned, one for each of Clifford’s daughters, although only one version of the painting survives.\textsuperscript{60} The inscriptions are thought to have been added by the same scribe who wrote parts of ‘the great books of record’, a collection of writings and heraldic illustrations concerning the Clifford family history.\textsuperscript{61}
Attributed to Jan Van Belcamp, The Great Picture Triptych (1646), oil on canvas. Centre panel: 254 x 254 cm. Side panels: 254 x 119.38 cm.
Attributed to the Dutch painter Jan Van Belcamp, the painting shows Clifford’s life across three huge panels; on the left panel Clifford is depicted at fifteen, the age at which she was disinherit; on the panel on the right-hand side, she is shown aged fifty-six. Depicting the passage of time, *The Great Picture Triptych* is therefore an example of the sort of portrait that Hieronimo mocks in the painter additions to *The Spanish Tragedy*. The central panel shows Clifford’s brothers and her parents, George Clifford and Lady Margaret Russell. An inscription on the painting notes that this central portrait is based on a previous image painted after the date of Anne’s conception in 1589. Clifford is therefore depicted ‘in utero’ in the central panel, which gestures towards the future depicted in the left and right panels.

Where Paulina presents the spectacle of the image of Hermione in the ‘statue scene’ in order to initiate the reunion between the Sicilian queen, her daughter and her husband, Clifford similarly deployed commemorative portraiture to assert matriarchal bonds within a conservative, familial framework. As noted above, spectator collusion in the ‘awakening’ of Paulina’s ‘stone’ is frequently understood as functioning in relation to viewers’ indefinitely incomplete understanding of Hermione as an unknowable image. Significantly, Clifford’s commissions also function around deferral and the transgression of formal boundaries. For example, the central panel of *The Great Picture Triptych* gestures towards the left-hand panel, and the latter gestures towards the image of the middle-aged Clifford present on the right-hand side of the portrait. Although the formal family unit shown in the central panel appears relatively static, Clifford’s siblings poised calmly at the feet of their parents, the gestation alluded to in this picture is the catalyst for a sense of lively movement that increasingly spills out into and beyond the left and right panels. The left panel depicts the rich potential of the teenage Clifford, shown flicking through a book of music on the table covered with an ostentatious red and gold cloth. In the background, shelves hold heavy books, including Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Montaigne’s *Essays*, neatly lined up and piled in groups of three and four. In the panel depicting Clifford as a woman in her late fifties, meanwhile, the scene is more animated and disordered. Clifford leans against a table similar to that depicted in the left-hand panel, but a greyhound leaps up at her skirts; a long paper overlaps the edge of the table, peeping out from under the pile of books on which she rests her hand. In the background, the shelves overflow with books carelessly replaced as if the reading process were hurriedly or half-finished. Significantly, parts of this panel are indeed incomplete. A biography of Clifford’s adult life is written on the piece of paper that peeps from under the books, unfolding over the side of the table. The biography on this paper is unfinished, or rather was unfolding at the time of composition, since Clifford was then still alive, and the information has not been added in retrospect. Indeed, the final sentence of this biography is unfinished, ending on a comma:
The 5th of July 1647 was this Countess of Pembroke’s youngest daughter by her first
Husband, the Lady Isabella Sackville, married in Clarkenwell Church London, to
James – Compton Earle of Northampton.65

The unfinished biography on the unfurling paper in The Great Picture Triptych
highlights the extent to which this portrait is invested in image-making as an
on-going process. The tiny inscriptions on the portrait were added by a scribe,
and so Van Belcamp must have initially produced an image littered with blank
spaces. The making of The Great Picture Triptych was therefore structured around
the deferral of material completion. The unfinished biography on the right-hand
panel may not have been a deliberate aesthetic choice, and we can only specu-
late that the other version of the painting may have at some point presented
more complete biographical information.

The investment in incompleteness in The Great Picture Triptych emerges else-
where in Clifford’s commissions, most notably in her funeral monument.
Clifford is buried in a vault in St Lawrence’s, Appleby, where there stands a
black marble monument which presents the Countess’s ancestry in a heraldic
family tree. Alice T. Friedman writes that in this monument, completed in 1666,
Clifford ‘abstracted and distilled her own image to the point of virtual invisibil-
ity’; Friedman reads this distillation as a rejection of the ‘chance’ for Clifford ‘to
place an image of her female body on her own monument’.66 Friedman suggests
that the design chosen by Clifford enabled her to emphasise her parity as a land-
owner with her ‘ancestors’ by becoming a ‘pervasive and omnipresent power
through her restorations and commemorative plaques’.67 Clifford thus utilised
dispersal and fracture in the negotiation of the patriarchal hierarchy within
which she was determined to be dominantly situated.

Where Clifford deployed a fractured aesthetic on her monument to assert
her standing as the female head of her estates, Paulina patronises an image that
disrupts the solidity of the monumentalised form in order to mark the reunion
of the Sicilian royal family. The supposed image of Hermione is ‘unfixed’ and
unstable partly because, like The Great Picture Triptych, the work attempts to
reflect the passage of time. For example, Leontes observes that the statue is pre-
sent with an ‘aged’ appearance (5.3.29). Displaying her technical knowledge
of the production of this alleged sculpture, Paulina explains that Hermione’s
‘wrinkled’ look is a reflection of the skill of ‘Giulio Romano’:

So much the more our carver’s excellence,
Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes her
As she lived now. (5.3.30–2)

In this version of the making of Hermione’s image, the ‘carver’ recalls the
appearance and ‘natural posture’ of the Hermione who lived sixteen years previ-
ously, while projecting a vision of the ‘future’ appearance that the supposedly
dead Sicilian queen would have acquired had she lived. Of course, this depiction
of an ‘aged’ Hermione hints at the revelation that the statue may not be made of stone after all, or that it may be subject to change. In this hint, Shakespeare suggests that we understand the statue as not just ‘aged’, but ‘ageing’. The statue is not complete, never a fixed, static ‘stone’, even before Paulina calls for ‘music’ and orders Hermione to ‘be stone no more’ (5.3.98–9).

It is significant that the incompleteness of the image of Hermione is articulated at the moments at which Paulina demonstrates her engagement with the commissioning process at a technical, practical level. Paulina’s material ownership of the ‘stone’ can therefore be seen as the source of the play’s bewildering deferral of meaning. Richard Wilson comes close to recognising this when he suggests that Paulina’s ‘gallery’ resembles a secluded matriarchal space such as a convent, or what Wilson calls ‘one of the isolated female spaces, unseen by patriarchal power’, that functions as a Foucauldian ‘heterotopia’, a place of suspended reality, in which events are placed ‘under the sign of indefinite erasure’. Focusing on the gendered nature of the space in which Paulina presents Hermione, Wilson does not consider the extent to which ‘indefinite erasure’ is evoked through a preoccupation with material erasure and ‘finish’ that is centred on and controlled by Paulina.

Paulina’s actions as ‘owner’ of the statue enable this ambiguous image to be viewed as a constantly transforming spectacle that seems to merge from stone to flesh as part of a continuum of on-going making and unmaking. Hermione’s sculpture is, after all, a long-term project, ‘many years in doing’, that now only teeters on the brink of completion (5.2.93–4). While the statue appears ‘masterly done’, Paulina warns that it is ‘but newly fixed; the colour’s / Not dry’ (5.3.47–65). In suggesting that the final coat of paint has been applied to the statue, but that this paint has not yet settled, Paulina presents the artwork as still in the process of reaching finish, and therefore susceptible to defacement. When Leontes and his daughter attempt to ‘kiss’ the sculpture both are prevented from doing so by Paulina, who states that such veneration would ruin the image. Leontes, for example, is asked to ‘forbear’, since:

The ruddiness upon her lip is wet.
You’ll mar it if you kiss it, stain your own
With oily painting. (5.3.80–3)

Accepting, with Wilson, that we cannot be certain at this point that ‘Hermione was alive all along’, it is possible to view Hermione-as-statue and the Hermione who ‘appears’ to live as fragments of the same partially assembled representation, a barely finished sculpture that becomes an ambiguously preserved living being (5.3.117). The indefinite ‘unknowability’ of Hermione’s image that has so appealed to critics is therefore articulated in the language of Paulina’s material ownership of the statue. Significantly, the ambiguity surrounding the status of the image is also generated by the fact that it is not reworked by Leontes, Perdita
and Polixenes, who obey Paulina’s instructions not to touch the statue. What would they (and the playhouse audience) have discovered if Leontes had not agreed to ‘forbear’? I have been arguing that interactive spectatorship is valued in early modern drama and is a facet of the commissioning process, so why is Paulina so keen to prohibit interactions between Hermione and her audience?

‘Great creating Nature’: parts and the whole

In order to understand Paulina’s actions in the ‘statue scene’, it is necessary to return to the earlier stages of the play, in which Shakespeare is preoccupied with the limitations of visual experience. In this approach, I follow the many critics who consider the final events of the play to be a restorative response to Leontes’s earlier tyranny, understood as an iconoclastic outburst against representational activity and visual experience. As noted above, Leontes’s tyrannical rage at his wife and newborn daughter in the early stages of the drama can be understood as an attempt to iconoclastically break his complicity in representational différance triggered by the ‘fault’ of interaction with women (1.2.85). Paulina, meanwhile, acts as the matriarchal mediator of referential images which are at first rejected by Leontes but which he learns to accept by the final ‘statue scene’. For example, in an attempt to persuade Leontes that he is Perdita’s father and that Hermione is innocent, Paulina shows him his newborn daughter:

It is yours,
And might we lay th’old proverb to your charge,
So like you, ’tis the worse. 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.
And thou, good goddess Nature, which hast made it
So like to him that got it, if thou hast
The ordering of the mind too, ’mongst all colours,
No yellow in’t, lest she suspect, as he does,
Her children not her husband’s. (2.3.94–106)

Perdita is here a direct copy, or imprint of her father, who is therefore also figured as an image, while Paulina is the knowing spectator of both. Reflecting her intimate knowledge of image-making, Paulina describes the formation of Perdita’s temperament through an allusion to the intermingling of colours, suggesting that the future Perdita would only be as ‘yellow’ (jealous) as Leontes if she doubted the paternity of her own children. Here again, Paulina draws attention to the fracture implicit in image-making, suggesting that Leontes’s jealousy is an extremity unlikely to be replicated in his daughter.
It is not a coincidence that Paulina refers to ‘Nature’ as a female deity in this speech. English writers had personified ‘nature’ as a woman, Natura, since at least the twelfth century, when the Platonist poet Bernard Silvestris introduces this goddess figure as an ‘artisan’ who is said to assist with the formation of bodies from chaotic matter, although ‘we do not actually see her doing this’ in Silvestris’s text. Nature appears onstage as a goddess and artificer in John Lyly’s The Woman in the Moon, which was entered into the Stationer’s Register in September 1595, and may have been performed in the early 1590s. Significantly, Lyly’s play opens with an appropriation of the Pygmalion myth, as a group of shepherds ‘beware their want of female sex’, and are answered by Nature, who reveals her ‘shop’, where stands a ‘clothed image’ of a woman, which is then given ‘sense and mind’, and made to ‘stand … move, or walk alone’ (1.1.50–77). Like the ‘goddess Nature’ described by Paulina, Lyly’s ‘Nature’ has made the woman, who is named Pandora, in a ‘mould’ that produces an ‘impression’ (1.1.63–5). When Paulina invokes ‘Nature’ as a female artisan, then, she forcefully reminds Leontes that the source of image-making is in sexual difference. Advocate of Perdita as a ‘copy’ of her father, therefore, Paulina acts as the proud patron of ‘Nature’ and so plays directly into Leontes’s misogynistic fear of representation.

It is worth pausing at this point to consider the implications of Leontes’s rage against mimesis. Although this desire to stand outside of mimetic representation is presented as Leontes’s erroneous ‘rebellion with himself’, it is a desire that is not entirely without foundation in early modern literary thought (1.2.352). In his Apology for Poetry, Sidney suggests that poets may surpass ‘Nature’ by making ‘forms such as never were in Nature’, and that ‘Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done’ (p. 85, lines 20–5). Having therefore made steep claims for poetry in comparison with God-created ‘Nature’, Sidney legitimises his position with reference to the poet’s post-lapsarian imperfection. Here I quote in detail Sidney’s thoughts on the frustrated ‘reach’ of the mortal poet:

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man’s wit with the efficacy of Nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (p. 85, line 44, p. 86, lines 1–8)

By legitimising poetic practice while drawing attention to its subversive potential, Sidney suggests that through mimesis poetry paradoxically goes ‘beyond Nature’ by reproducing non-mimetic, creative representation. Sidney expresses
deference to God in his allusion to ‘that first accursed fall of Adam’, but D. H. Craig advises that we should not take Sidney’s deference ‘too seriously’, after all, the poet’s declaration of the imperfection of mortal wit forms a stage of an argument designed to convince readers that poetry is the source of immortality (p. 116, lines 20–42, p. 117, lines 1–12). Sidney, like Leontes, is frustrated by the imperfections of post-lapsarian language; literary production is an attempt at ‘reaching’ beyond these limitations while simultaneously remaining within ‘accursed’, fallen boundaries.

Is Shakespeare interested in testing these representational boundaries? Where Sidney legitimises ‘reaching unto perfection’ as a facet of poetic activity, in Leontes, Shakespeare associates such ambition with erroneous destruction. Accepting Felperin’s deconstructive reading of the play, it is arguable that Shakespeare encourages audiences to celebrate the limitations of mimesis, embracing ‘the fallen and irredeemable nature of language as a medium for defining human reality’. Even Knapp’s interpretation of the deconstructive force of the ‘statue scene’ as an impetus for ethical action depends upon Shakespeare’s acceptance of the ‘incomprehensible … the condition of living in a world that we can never fully understand’. Moreover, that Shakespeare encourages deference regarding mimesis as the language of fallen humanity is suggested by a well-known conversation between Polixenes and Perdita during the Bohemian ‘sheep-shearing’ scenes. Here, Perdita is living as the daughter of the shepherd who finds the princess at the end of Act 3, reluctantly abandoned as an infant by Antigonus at the stormy Bohemian coast, along with letters and a box of riches confirming her noble birth (3.3.46–121). Perdita is unaware of her true parentage but is famed in Bohemia for appearing ‘more than can be thought to begin’ from a shepherd’s ‘cottage’ (4.2.43–4). Polixenes’ son, Florizel, has fallen in love with Perdita and attends a sheep-shearing festival at which she is ‘mistress of the feast’ (4.3.40). Also in attendance at the feast in order to spy on Florizel are Polixenes and Camillo, a Sicilian courtier who defects to Bohemia in the wake of Leontes’s tyranny. While there, Polixenes engages in conversation with Perdita who, like her father sixteen years previously, is suspicious of image-making. She tells Polixenes that she will not ‘get slips’ of ‘gillyvors’, which she refers to as ‘Nature’s bastards’, because she believes that their colourful ‘piedness’ is an artificial corruption of ‘great creating Nature’ (4.4.82–8). Polixenes responds with an explanation of the relationship between artifice and nature that locates the latter as a divine, originary source for artifice:

Yet Nature is made better by no mean
But Nature makes that mean. So over that art,
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art
That Nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend Nature – change it rather – but
The art itself is Nature. (4.4.89–97)

Here, Polixenes asserts that artificial composition is at root natural. Metatheatrically, this world-view defends performance as natural, and also legitimises Polixenes’ assumption of a disguise in order to spy on Florizel, managing his son’s sexual activity and therefore the continuation of the Bohemian royal line. Artifice is here a function of the natural social order, occasionally producing unnatural-seeming images that appear to defy explanation; Polixenes, for example, observes that Perdita is ‘too noble’ for the shepherd’s dwelling, that everything she ‘does or seems / … smacks of something greater than herself’ (4.4.157–8). Of course, Polixenes is a hypocrite at this point, because he disapproves of the union between Florizel and Perdita, whom he believes to be ‘a bark of baser kind’. Within the logic that the Bohemian king expounds here, however, that hypocrisy is itself a natural product, and is soon resolved by the subsequent natural-artificial events of the play by which Perdita is revealed to be the Sicilian princess and Florizel’s social equal. Florizel’s mingling with a figure who appeared to be his social inferior thus ‘naturally’ produces the continuation of a regal lineage. Jensen takes the exchange between Polixenes and Perdita as a transitional moment for the Sicilian princess, as Perdita subsequently chooses ‘new flowers’ and begins to speak in rich metaphorical language of ‘symbolic grafting’. Perdita begins to be satisfied with modes of image-making that involve working with the fracture of referentiality, and so paves the way for Leontes’s similar acceptance of referential image-making, in his ‘acknowledgement of hermeneutic discrepancy – the fabulous image (statuam) of a feigned absence’. In this view, Perdita and Leontes learn to accept that referential fracture is so because of the divinity of creation; that if what they see does not fully comprehend as a whole, then that too is generated by divinity. This is the logic that informs critical understanding of the ‘statue scene’ as a moment of reconciliation with the ‘incomprehensible image’ figured in Hermione. And yet there is reason to suggest that Shakespeare is not satisfied with referential limitations and is preoccupied with the possibility of accessing a divine ‘wholeness’, both as a visible ‘object of view’ and as point of view. Since, in Calvinist thought, God’s creative work could be seen in the earthly landscape and in people, mortal vision marks a distinction between earthly subject and God as creator. Awareness of the limitations of mortal as contrasted with divine visual experience therefore also evokes earthly distance from originary, creative modes of signification. Notably, throughout the early scenes of The Winter’s Tale, Leontes’s limited and distorted viewpoint is contrasted with a divine, un polluted and all-encompassing perspective. Exasperated at his monarch’s irrational jealousy, a Sicilian Lord assures Leontes that Hermione ‘is spot-
The unknowable image in The Winter’s Tale

less / I th’ eyes of heaven and to you’ (2.1.131–2). Hermione, similarly, suggests that ‘innocence’ will shame ‘false accusation’, ‘if powers divine / Behold our human actions – as they do’ (3.2.27–8). These allusions to divine omniscience draw attention to the fracture of Leontes’s visual experience in contrast to the access to the ‘whole’ enjoyed by God. Such contrasts recall St Augustin’s account of sensory experience in the ‘flesh’ as always piecemeal, since:

you are ignorant of the whole to which the parts belong. Yet they delight you. But if your physical perception were capable of comprehending the whole and had not, for your punishment, been justly restrained to a part of the universe, you would wish everything at present in being to pass away, so that the totality of things could provide you with greater pleasure … There would be more delight in all the elements than in individual pieces if only one had the capacity to perceive all of them. But far superior to these things is he who made all things, and he is our God.87

Elsewhere, Augustine claims that transcendent contemplation of the certain knowledge of God’s constancy enables him to glimpse God’s “‘invisible nature understood through the things which are made” (Rom. 1:20). But I did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed.”88 Augustine, whose works were used by English Protestant readers, thus considers God to be only fractionally perceptible through the sight of earthly creation.89 Augustine’s emphasis on the fragmented state of human insight into the world and thus God’s invisibility locates incompleteness as a facet of visual experience and therefore the experience of image-making. The relevance of this model of spectating for an early modern English context is suggested by Brian Cummings’s analysis of God’s grace as the ‘outrepasse’ subject over which sixteenth-century writing ‘ineluctably exhausts itself’, searching for what is ‘at once invisible trace and dangerous supplement, simultaneously grammatological and illegible’.90

Importantly, Shakespeare repeatedly emphasises that playgoers watching The Winter’s Tale only have access to ‘individual pieces’ of the play-world, and not the whole picture which is implicitly present but unavailable. In the opening lines of the drama the Bohemian courtier Archidamus promises Camillo that were he to ‘visit Bohemia’ he would ‘see, as I have said, great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicilia’ (1.1.1–4). Having invited Camillo’s judgement, Archidamus suggests that this must be modified, joking that ‘we will give you sleepy drinks, that your senses, unintelligent of our insufficiency, may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us’ (1.1.13–16). It might be argued that unlike the drugged Camillo of ‘Archidamus’s barbiturate fantasy’, the playhouse audience at least has access to an unpolluted view of the contrast between courtly Sicilia and pastoral Bohemia.91 Yet Shakespeare draws attention to spectators’ complicity in the mediated construction of these locations when he deploys the figure of Time as a Chorus to orchestrate the shift between Sicilia and Bohemia sixteen years later, asking audience members to ‘imagine
Making and unmaking in early modern English drama

Shakespeare’s audience are complicit in the construction of the artificial ‘parts’; they cannot access the pre-mediated view of the ‘whole’ of the contrast between Sicilia and Bohemia that Archidamus would seek to control with ‘sleepy drinks’. That an omniscient view is present yet unavailable in the play-world is also suggested by Leontes’s recourse to the Apollonian oracle which, immediately prior to the announcement of the deaths of Mamillius and Hermione, and just after the banishment of Perdita, declares that Leontes’s wife is ‘chaste, Polixenes blameless’ and that ‘the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found’ (3.2.130–3). Realising the full extent of his catastrophic error, Leontes revives the image of himself and Polixenes as one, but this time the figure is split and corroded, the Sicilian king observing that the innocence of Polixenes ‘glisters / through my rust’ (3.2.167–8). Images of wholeness and fissure are also deployed following Leontes’s penitence of sixteen years, as Hermione becomes a figure of a perfection surpassing the fracture offered by lived experience. Prior to the ‘statue scene’, Paulina advises Leontes of the impossibility of his remarriage, telling him:

If one by one you wedded all the world,
Or from the all that are took something good
To make a perfect woman, she you killed
Would be unparalleled. (5.1.13–16)

Paulina’s advice neatly reflects the possibility that Hermione may have been ‘preserved’ for the past sixteen years while anticipating her reunion with Leontes and Perdita at the end of the play. At the same time, Paulina’s declaration of the impossibility of ‘making’ a perfect woman comparable to Hermione alludes to Shakespeare’s Ovidian source in the myth of Pygmalion, in which a sculptor falls in love with the ivory image that he has sculpted, and, following successful prayers to Venus, discovers that his beloved statue turns from stone to flesh. Significantly, Pygmalion makes his ivory sculpture because he is ‘revolted by the many faults which nature has implanted in the female sex, and long lived a bachelor existence, without any wife to share his home’. Stimulated by ‘a strange combination of frustration and desire, misogyny and idealization’, Pygmalion, with the help of a divine agent, brings something into being which stands outside the faults of ‘Nature’. In The Winter’s Tale, Paulina implies that a similar divinely sanctioned action would be necessary to produce Hermione, who is implicitly beyond ‘perfect’, the ‘parts’ available in the world being insufficient for her composition. When spectators in the play-world and the playhouse encounter Hermione’s statue in the final scene, both groups have therefore already been encouraged to recognise the Sicilian queen as resembling a divine Other as described by Knapp and Gusain, as well as a gendered other.
How can this vision of Hermione as beyond perfection, evocative of divine Otherness, be reconciled with the depiction of the image as a commissioned, material artefact?

‘Touching overhard’: Pygmalion, Paulina and prohibition

Valerie Traub understands the monumentalisation of Hermione as the physical encasement in stone of the sexual threat posed by the female body. ¹⁹⁷ I have argued, however, that the supposed statue of The Winter’s Tale is materially unfixed, an unknown quantity that seems to breathe beneath a smudgeable, moist layer of what might be paint. Pre- and post-transformation, the image of Hermione presents a continuation in the performative life of the same piece of ‘matter’. Materially, therefore, Hermione can be described as matter that has no fixed form and so contains no limit or inward fracture, and is therefore unknowably ‘unified’ in contrast to the imagined woman assembled from ‘parts’ that Paulina has encouraged Leontes, and the playhouse audience expectant of a reunion, to reject. As Lynn Enterline suggests, ‘the statue is not mimetic; its beauty supersedes that of any living woman’, and so, in the image of Hermione, ‘Shakespeare aspires to a mode of representation that can move beyond the impasse’. ⁹⁸ When Paulina facilitates the unknowability of Hermione by preventing Leontes’s and Perdita’s contact with the statue, then, she acts as a matriarchal guardian for inaccessible, divine wholeness.

How exactly does Paulina facilitate that unknowability? It is important to note that this process is not merely the result of the inset spectators not touching the alleged sculpture prior to its ‘transformation’. Touch is not a stable source of knowing in The Winter’s Tale or in the Pygmalion myth. ⁹⁹ In the former, Leontes, under the instructions of Paulina, offers his ‘hand’ to the apparently newly transformed Hermione, exclaiming ‘she’s warm!’ (5.3.107–9). Despite this physical contact, Leontes and the playhouse audience do not know for certain what Hermione’s warmth means, merely that ‘it appears she lives’ (5.3.117). Similarly, in Arthur Golding’s English translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, first published in 1567, Pygmalion uses touch in an attempt to test the status of the ivory image. ¹⁰⁰

believed his fingers made a dint
Upon her flesh, and fearèd lest some black or bruisèd print
Should come by touching overhard. ¹⁰¹

Living skin is here considered identifiable by the markings that it may receive, such as the bruise that will appear if skin is touched ‘overhard’. Yet Pygmalion’s physical contact with the image leads him into further doubt as to its status, just as playgoers remain ignorant about the status of Hermione’s image in spite of Leontes’s contact with her ‘warmth’. Golding affirms the possibility
that Pygmalion’s image is not ivory by describing the sculptor’s beliefs about the material condition of the statue as these apply to ‘her flesh’, rather than to a hard, ivory surface. Like Hermione’s image, the statue in this version of the Pygmalion myth is not a firm, discrete object subsequent to its transformation into ‘flesh’.

Although the statue of Hermione and Pygmalion’s image can both be understood as unfixed matter, the role of touch in these evocations of a lack of fixity is distinctly different. As noted above, during the ‘statue scene’, and under Paulina’s instruction, the Sicilian king and his daughter adopt a physically passive mode of spectatorship; Perdita, for example, states that she would be happy to ‘stand by, a looker-on’ to the image for ‘twenty years’ (5.3.83–4). Similarly, when Paulina demands that ‘all stand still’ as she orchestrates the transformation of the statue, Leontes uses his authority to ensure the passivity of all spectators present, assuring her that ‘no foot shall stir’ (5.3.95–7). The ambiguous matter of Hermione’s sculpture transforms untouched, but Pygmalion’s image is worked into being by the sculptor following the deific intervention of Venus:

Pygmalion did repair
Unto the image of his wench and, leaning on the bed,
Did kiss her. In her body straight a warmness seemed to spread.
He put his mouth again to hers and on her breast did lay
His hand. The ivory waxèd soft and, putting quite away
All hardness, yielded underneath his fingers, as we see
A piece of wax made soft against the sun or drawn to be
In divers shapes by chafing it between one’s hands and so
To serve to uses. He, amazed, stood wavering to and fro
‘Tween joy and fear to be beguiled. Again he burnt in love,
Again with feeling he began his wishèd hope to prove.
He felt it very flesh indeed. By laying on his thumb
He felt her pulses beating. (10, lines 304–16)

The ivory image pre-transformation resembles the potent matter of wax, ‘drawn ...

To serve to uses’, and ready to be warmly loosened and reworked. Touch is once again a test of the status of the image as this time the press of Pygmalion’s thumb yields the pulse that he wants to feel. This pulse does not, however, fully signify the presence of a living, conscious being; that is achieved only by Pygmalion’s symbolic, practical action. Delighted that the image has been granted warmth and a beating pulse, Pygmalion ‘at length … laid / His mouth to hers who was as then become perfect maid’ (10, lines 317–18). It is only at this point that sense is attributed to the statue, as ‘she felt the kiss and blushed thereat’ (10, line 319). The symbolic action of the kiss seals the transformation that is set in motion by divine action, imbuing the image with sensory experience and conscious responses. The attainment of supernatural ‘perfection’ is
therefore discursive and divinely ordained; Pygmalion uses touch to participate in the transformation, but certainty that this has taken place is out of his hands.

It is at this point that a significant difference between the Ovidian Pygmalion myth and the ‘statue scene’ emerges. In the former, the symbolic ‘making’ of the perfect woman is accompanied by material, tactile interaction with the image both pre- and post-transformation. In contrast, in The Winter’s Tale, the symbolic kissing of Hermione is expressly forbidden by Paulina. Pygmalion’s obsessive touching of his statue is in keeping with the association between this Ovidian figure and idolatrous sexual transgression. This association was certainly known to Shakespeare, since the bawd Pompey refers to prostitutes as ‘Pygmalion’s images newly made woman’ in Measure for Measure. Moreover, the biblical link between adultery and idolatry has been identified as a source of influence on the early scenes of The Winter’s Tale. It is appropriate, then, that the reunion of Leontes and the wife that he falsely accuses of adultery is couched in a modest version of the Pygmalion myth in which ecstatic physical contact is carefully managed. Kissing played an important role in pre-Reformation ritual, and so Paulina’s strict monitoring of attempts to kiss the statue helps to contain the scene’s otherwise intense engagement with Catholic iconography. There is something else at work here, however; prohibiting symbolic contact with Hermione’s image, Paulina encourages spectators to evade complicity as spectators in referential image-making.

In a pertinent discussion of Ovid’s poem, Enterline has suggested that the transformation of Pygmalion’s image reveals that ‘“figures” and “images” are less a representation of the world than a kind of force exercised upon it’. In this configuration, the subject engages with the world by ‘doing something about it’ rather than ‘knowing it’, since touch ‘exceeds the claims of will or intention’. Enterline notes that ‘doing something’ opens the risk of ‘being done to’; this is a concern particularly pertinent for early modern contexts, given the reciprocal tactility attributed to vision during the period. We might note here that as Leontes views the ambiguous matter of Hermione’s image, he is said to be reworked by the sight, Paulina regretting that ‘my poor image’ has left the king emotionally ‘wrought’ (5.3.57–8). Looking therefore always implies ‘doing something’, to borrow Enterline’s phrase, as an unpredictable force acts upon the viewer who is thus a reactive participant in a material interaction with the viewed. Again, we might understand Leontes’s physical contact with Hermione following her alleged transformation as his being worked upon, rather than his engaging with the image. He offers his hand to his wife only when instructed to do so by Paulina, who chides him for forcing Hermione to be the ‘suitor’ (5.3.109). After this initial contact, it is said that Hermione ‘hangs about’ Leontes’s ‘neck’ (5.3.112). Leontes is not an agent of touch here; he is coerced into touching and is then touched in response.

Paulina, then, prevents Leontes and Perdita from ‘doing something’ with
the supposed statue that they view. In so doing, Paulina prohibits modes of materially interactive spectatorship that were in widespread use during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For example, prints were functional objects rather than ‘regarded as sacrosanct artworks’ in the early modern period, and ‘many exhibit obvious marks of physical intervention by their users’.¹⁰⁸ Many prints function on the basis of defacement, with readers folding and peeling back layers to reveal hidden meanings. Anatomical prints presented the figure of the human body with flaps which the viewer could lift up or displace so as to reveal the anatomical ‘insides’ of the figure, as in three broadsheets by Lucas Kilian, together titled *Mirrors of the Microcosm (catoptri Microcosmi)* (1613).¹⁰⁹ Defacement is inbuilt into these educational prints, since the broadsheets were probably ‘purchased preassembled from their publisher’, allowing users to ‘dissect’ the bodies depicted, and cover up anatomy and organs as preferred.¹¹ Most pertinently for *The Winter’s Tale*, defacement is also encouraged as a mean through which to interrogate the reliability of female appearances. A highly misogynistic engraving by Conrad Goltzius, entitled *Pride* (figures 16–17), presents a female courtier as beautiful in appearance, but possessed of a corrupt interior.

It is through the physical engagement of the viewer in lifting up a flap in the shape of the woman’s skirt that the interior view is revealed. In removing the outer layer of the image, and actually altering its appearance, the viewer receives moral instruction, and a moral understanding of the evils of the vanity presented by the engraving as it appears with the skirt in place. Defacement is similarly recommended as a way of ‘testing’ women’s appearances in early modern English drama. In the anonymous play *Two Wise Men and All the Rest Fooles*, for example, Levitia jokes with the courtier Insatiato that in order to tell whether or not a woman wears cosmetics, he should ‘take a pin, and scratch her cheek pretie deepe to the bone, and if it bleed not, assure your selfe she is painted’.¹¹¹ Levitia depicts all women as distinguishable from painted objects only through violent defacement. Recalling Pygmalion’s tactile search for ‘proof’ that his statue could bruise, image-breaking here provides a model for the violent assessment of female artifice.

These iconoclastic modes of ‘doing something’ with images produce new images by revealing previously hidden appearances. Defacement therefore contributes to the referential fracture of mimetic representation, splitting an image by scraping away one surface to expose another. The examples noted above suggest that defacement is considered a valid, meaningful practice in both early modern drama and visual culture. More than this, ‘doing something’ with that which you view is an advisable response given that the act of looking will entail being ‘done to’. Paulina reflects on this reciprocal interaction between the viewer and the viewed when she advises Leontes that if he kisses the statue he’ll ‘mar’ the painted surface of the image and ‘stain’ his ‘own’ lips (5.3.82).
And yet Paulina gives this advice in order to prevent Leontes from touching the supposed statue, and therefore to remove the visible part of his complicity in the material exchange of spectatorship. As a result, the image of Hermione is not split or defaced; no ‘new’ image is produced. In the Ovidian Pygmalion
myth, the kiss symbolically makes the image into the ‘perfect’ woman. In The Winter’s Tale, the prohibition on kissing and touching symbolically removes Leontes, and implicitly playgoers, from visible, tangible participation in referentiality. Ensuring that Leontes and Perdita do not touch the ‘unknowable’ image
allows Shakespeare to ‘reach unto perfection’, to present spectacle that exists on the boundaries of the fracture of mimesis, that can never be broken because its contours as an object are not known. Indeed, as noted above, Hermione is never a discrete, fixed object; Paulina’s cautioning of Leontes makes clear that the statue is reworkable matter that changes and transforms untouched before spectators’ eyes. Rather than engaging Leontes and playgoers in a celebratory acceptance of referentiality, the ‘statue scene’ therefore offers Leontes a close approximation to the realisation of his fantasy of a divine, non-referential ‘wholeness’.

Paulina’s working relationship with Giulio Romano therefore produces a protean image that recalls the amorphous ‘unity’ of Adam and Eve as depicted by Trevilian, the first woman still half-submerged in the first man’s side. As much as the protean nature of this image is dependent on not being touched by spectators, it has been necessary to discuss the material construction of the statue in order to realise its identification with divine creativity. Of course, it is not possible for Shakespeare to fully stand outside discursive boundaries, and any ‘wholeness’ associated with Hermione’s image is constructed in relation to notions of material fracture. She becomes a divine ‘Other’ because she is also the material other that may be defaced. In some ways, my argument has merely reproduced critical preoccupation with the unknowability of Hermione. The argument that Shakespeare may be interested in the ‘making’ of non-referentiality, however, points us in an important direction. As I discuss in the next chapter, Shakespeare’s attempts to ‘reach unto perfection’ in The Winter’s Tale reflect an interest in what it means to create, ‘make’ or ‘unmake’ a representation that is of greater significance for early modern dramatists than has previously been realised. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the ‘statue scene’ is often used as the focal point at which to draw conclusions regarding the aesthetic concerns of Shakespearean drama. In contrast, this chapter has discussed The Winter’s Tale and its infamously beguiling statue in order to open up a detailed interrogation of early modern aesthetic meaning.

Notes
1 See O’Connell, The Idolatrous Eye, p. 141; Meek, Narrating the Visual, p. 150.
2 Spectators are, for example, forewarned that Portia intends to appear before her husband disguised as a man before the scene in which she appears as a lawyer in order to resolve the dispute between Shylock and Antonio, in William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, ed. John Russell Brown, The Arden Shakespeare, second series (London: Methuen, 1955), 3.4.60–78.
3 Meek, Narrating the Visual, p. 178.
4 On this narrative deferral, see Meek, Narrating the Visual, pp. 172–80.
5 Meek, Narrating the Visual, p. 185.
6 In a concluding chapter on The Winter’s Tale, Knapp writes that ‘the theatrical
Making and unmaking in early modern English drama


7 O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, p. 141.
17 Dawson and Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing*, p. 207.
22 Felperin, ‘‘Tongue-tied our queen?’’, p. 16.
28 Gusain, ‘With what’s unreal’, 8–9, 17.
The unknowable image in The Winter’s Tale

30 Johnson, Mother Tongues, pp. 17–25, 50–1, 65–9, 85–93.
32 Adelman, Suffocating Mothers, p. 235.
33 See Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 212–14.
34 Jensen, Religion and Revelry, p. 213.
37 See Johnson, Mother Tongues, pp. 50–1.
41 Sokol, Art and Illusion, p. 152.
42 Gusain, ‘With what’s unreal’, 16.
44 Gallagher, ‘This seal’d up Oracle’, 485.
45 On Romano’s works, see Manfredo Tafuri, Giulio Romano, trans. Fabio Barry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
47 Lupton suggests that Romano is ‘a strangely fitting candidate for his role as maker of a fictive statue’, since in his Lives, Vasari describes Romano’s designs for the Villa Madama in Rome, which demonstrate this visual artist’s skills in constructing ‘a space that is both a theatre and a gallery, a semicircular building of niches that hold Roman statuary’, Afterlives of the Saints, pp. 212–13. See also Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Artists, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 360–1.
49 Lupton, Thinking with Shakespeare, p. 184.
50 Lupton, Thinking with Shakespeare, p. 184.
51 Belsey, Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden, p. 112.
52 Belsey, Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden, p. 114; Belsey refers to Bruce R. Smith, ‘Sermons in Stones: Shakespeare and Renaissance Sculpture’, Shakespeare Studies, 17 (1985), 1–23, 20. O’Connor suggests that Hermione’s statue is ‘legible both as the devotional image of a saint and as the monumental portrait of a deceased lady’,
but does not discuss the context of monumental imagery in detail in ‘Imagine Me, Gentle Spectators’, p. 375.


54 I regret that in focusing on Clifford I contribute to critical overemphasis on elite examples of female patronage of the visual arts in early modern England. More research is needed on early modern English women patrons below the level of the elite; see Tittler, Portraits, Painters, and Publics, pp. 54–5.


59 Spence, ‘Clifford, Anne’.

60 Spence, ‘Clifford, Anne’.

61 Spence, ‘Clifford, Anne’.

62 Spence suggests that the painting could also be the work of the English painter Peter Lely in ‘Clifford, Anne’.


65 Inscription on The Great Picture (1646), Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal.


68 Wilson, Secret Shakespeare, p. 248.

69 Wilson, Secret Shakespeare, p. 263; Wilson here rejects Lupton’s assertion that ‘Hermione was alive all along’ in Afterlives of the Saints, p. 217.

70 See Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 212–29, and Knapp, Image Ethics, pp. 161–82. Gusain speaks of the ‘violence’ of Leontes’s response to beauty as presented in Hermione, ‘With what’s unreal’, 2–4. See also Gallagher, who argues that the move from Leontes’s rejection of Hermione to the presentation of the supposed statue ‘rewrites iconoclasm, figuring it not as a destructive rejection of the iconic/idolatrurous sign but as a creative appropriation, a reoriented reading of the narrativity

71 See Jensen, Religion and Revelry, p. 216.

72 See Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 226–7; Knapp compares Leontes’s responses to images in Acts 1 and 5 of the play in Image Ethics, pp. 161–82.


77 See Adelman’s discussion of this scene in Suffocating Mothers, p. 227.

78 R. W. Maslen explains in his introduction to Sidney’s Apology that this work is ‘partly dedicated’ to discussing poetry as the discipline that most successfully ‘dispenses’ the ‘force’ that may be necessary to ‘bridge the distance’ between ‘the immense potential of humanity and the immense distance that lies between our current state and the fulfilment of this potential’, ‘Introduction’, Apology for Poetry, pp. 1–78, p. 43.


80 Felperin, ‘Tongue-tied our queen?’, p. 16.

81 Knapp, Image Ethics, p. 181.

82 See Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 218–22.

83 Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 222–3.

84 Gallagher, ‘This seal’d up Oracle’, 466.

85 Knapp, Image Ethics, p. 181.

86 See Clark, Vanities of the Eye, p. 11.


88 Augustine, Confessions, p. 127. Chadwick (trans.) explains in a prefatory note that Augustine uses the Old Latin Bible.
Making and unmaking in early modern English drama

91 Gallagher, ‘This seal’d up Oracle’, 475.
92 Gallagher writes that Archidamus’s ‘fantasy spells out the self-defeating logic of the double, which can sustain its idyllic proposition of unmediated reduplication only by invoking the oblivion of a drug-induced sleep’, ‘This seal’d up Oracle’, 475.
93 Emphasis is in the text.
96 See Knapp, Image Ethics, p. 165.
100 Although Golding’s was the first English translation of Ovid’s poem, it should be noted that the Metamorphoses was known to Shakespeare’s contemporaries through ‘diverse cultural locations’ having ‘entered English vernacular culture and texts with a powerful force not necessarily best located in relation to an “original”’, Susan Wiseman, ‘“Popular Culture”: A Category for Analysis?’, in Andrew Hadfield and Matthew Dimmock (eds), Literature and Popular Culture in Early Modern England (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 15–28, p. 17; see also Raphael Lyne, Ovid’s Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses 1567–1632 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Liz Oakley-Brown, Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
103 See Lupton, Afterlives of the Saints, pp. 185–9, and Jensen, Religion and Revelry, pp. 215–16.
The unknowable image in The Winter’s Tale


110 Schmidt, *Altered and Adorned*, p. 82.

111 Anon, *Two Wise Men and All the Rest Fooles: Or a Comicall Morall censuring the follies of this age, as it hath been diverse times acted* (London, 1619), p. 90.