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The “local habitation” of Marian Intercession in Shakespeare’s Plays of Justice and Mercy

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Casting doubt on the stories of the lovers in the woods, Theseus, in the speech on which this year’s conference is based, singles out lunatics and lovers for perceiving what is not present. But the poet’s eye, he says, “doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,” giving “things unknown...a local habitation and a name” (5.1.14-18). Although Theseus speaks of fairy interventions, the same could be said of the intercession by the Virgin Mary for the fate of one’s soul, which, although officially erased from England’s religion, is alluded to in three dramas of justice and mercy, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Winter’s Tale*. Images of the blessed virgin and mother--never explicit, but set in Vienna, Venice, and Sicily, where contemporary practice pertaining to Marian intercession would have thrived—weave in and out of the scenes in which female advocates persuade, either invited or moved by pity and need. Fitting this pattern are not only Portia’s “quality of mercy” speech and Isabella’s solicited pleadings for her brother’s life, but also Hermione’s requested extensions of hospitality to Polixenes; Paulina’s insistences, only eventually successful, to Leontes that Hermione had been faithful; and Isabella’s turn from understandably self-interested pleas for justice to a truly sacrificial plea for mercy. Of course, these examples fit into a broader continuum of Shakespearean heroines who plead, from the Duchess of York, comically begging for clemency for her son after it had already been granted, to Volumnia, persuading Coriolanus not to invade Rome and in so doing, tread on his mother’s womb. Yet in the plays most explicitly about justice and mercy, there is particular resonance in the residual role of the Marian intercessor in the face of harsh, and sometimes deserved, judgment. Just as Hippolyta sees substance in the tales of the lovers in the woods, their minds “transfigured so together” (5.1.25), there is continuing and local appeal in these Marian echoes as part of the early modern stage’s contested concerns about mercy, justice, and the feminine on the path toward redemption.

Pivotal to this discussion are several images of Mary that, although long removed from England’s cathedrals, parish churches, and the

THE “LOCAL HABITATION” OF MARIAN INTERCESSION IN
SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS OF JUSTICE AND MERCY

no-longer existent monasteries by the time of the plays, nonetheless continued to flourish in Europe and possibly in private treasure. These images include Mary kneeling, such as those that survived in English-owned Books of Hours, for example the illumination of the Annunciation in the Book of Hours that Richard III was purported to have taken with him to Bosworth Field (Lambeth Palace MS 474). A more widely circulated image of Mary kneeling is the woodcut of the Seven Sorrows, or Mater Dolorosa, that was reprinted by Francois Regnault in Books of Hours for the English market up to and just beyond the Henrician reformation (RSTC 15968; Duffy *Marking* 124). Eamon Duffy equates the image with the motif of the grieving mother that bordered rood screens throughout England until waves of iconoclasm ordered its removal: “Every parish church contained an image of this Mater Dolorosa, for all were dominated by the Rood across the chancel arch, invariably flanked by the mourning figures of Mary and the Beloved Disciple” (*Stripping* 260). Still more pertinent to the role of Mary as intercessor is the *Mater Misericordia*, extensively sculpted and painted since the late Middle Ages encircling broods of the faithful in the arms of her voluminous cloak. Representative of this image so ubiquitous in late medieval and early modern European churches is the following panel from Piero della Francesca’s Polyptych of the Misericordia, in which Mary, with arms outstretched, towers over kneeling penitents.



Memorialized liturgically in the praying of the *Salve Regina*, this image of Mary as *advocata nostra* depicts her as a protector whose intercession can lead the faithful from punishment and exile to eternal salvation.

Recent scholarship has become open to what Duffy refers to as “a Catholic dimension of early modern English culture,” evident particularly in architecture, with the Elizabethan preoccupation of the memory in the “very stones” of the parish churches as a case in point. Thus, although the Elizabethan injunctions of 1599 dictated whitewashing and removal of candles and rood screens, with their all-pervasive statues of John and Mary, the edict was also, Duffy demonstrates, tempered by the slowness of churches such as that in Stratford in removing the rood lofts and other vestiges of the old religion (*Bare* 40; 45-46). Arthur Marotti sketches the cultural ecology of such a Stratford as follows:

Especially in rural areas, the transformation from Catholic to Protestant culture was a slow one, so the situation of the Stratford of Shakespeare’s youth and early manhood was, in some respects, quite typical, that of a religiously hybridized and confessionally ambiguous local culture with a necessary latitude for toleration of religious difference, despite the legislative and governmental acts and actions meant to enforce a new Protestant conformity. (219)

This sense of adaptation is key to the post-Reformation Catholicism defined by Frances Dolan as “not a coherent theology but rather a cultural phenomenon, an eclectic ensemble of objects, images, stories, practices, and beliefs that might be drawn on indiscriminately” (214). Dolan points out that “ritual objects were sometimes melted down or burned, but often simply redistributed and assigned new places and functions wherein they often maintained a vaguely magical significance” (215). Continuing that Protestant worship occurred in the same buildings that previously held Catholic worship, she asserts that “beliefs and practices were even more lingering because less tangible” (215), having adapted to waves of reform, political compromise, and personal variegations. Because of this complex and shifting characterization of religion, the Marian *advocata* who resurfaces on Shakespeare’s stage sometimes embodies more of a

Protestant-sanctioned sense of redemption, even as her suffering initially suggests a more traditional concept of salvation.

Yet however beloved among quiet upholders of tradition in post-Reformation England, the Marian image nonetheless refracts into taint when embodied by Portia, Isabella, Hermione, and Paulina, with all the complexities of early modern gender roles at play. In *Masculinity and Marian Efficacy in Shakespeare’s England*, Ruben Espinosa writes of an “intercessory promiscuity” that undermines Portia and Isabella as outspoken, persuasive women even as *The Merchant of Venice* “reinvents Marian strength” (60) and *Measure for Measure* embodies, through Isabella’s pleadings at the city gates, a visual image of Mary as “champion of sinners” that would have been a comfort to certain of the anxious and remorseful (88). He sees this apparent promiscuity as particularly manifest in Bassanio’s gift of his ring from Portia to the advocate—of course, Portia in disguise—whom he believes to be Balthasar, and Angelo’s almost immediate sexualization of Isabella as she pleads for Claudio’s life. Espinosa additionally interprets Bassanio’s bequeathing of Portia’s ring and the courtroom moment that predicated it—that is, Bassanio’s declaration in front of the disguised Portia that he would sacrifice her and all else that is dear if only doing so would save Antonio—as making her symbolically and rhetorically available to all.

Notwithstanding the ring test’s highlighting of *Bassanio*’s promiscuous loyalty to Antonio, any suggestion of promiscuity on the part of Portia would derive, I suggest, from the same assumption that fuels Angelo’s attraction to Isabella as well as Lucio’s request that she plead for Claudio in the first place. That is, of course, the underlying suspicion of all women who speak, even under the most needful and exceptional of circumstances, as being verbally, and hence, sexually, magnetic, immodest, or vulnerable. Consider, for instance, the view of maidenhood making women particularly persuasive in Lucio’s remark that “when maidens sue/ Men give like gods, but when they weep and kneel,/ All their petitions are as freely theirs/ As they themselves would wish to owe them” (1.1. 80-84). If circulating the ring of one’s wife and wishing her life as forfeit for that of Antonio makes her symbolically and rhetorically available to all, then Gratiano does these same things to Nerissa as he wishes openly for her intercession: “I have a wife who, I protest, I love/ I

would she were in heaven, so she could/ Entreat some power to change this currish Jew” (4.1.287-90).

This expectation of feminine appeal to pathos, coupled with the assumed immodesty of the heroine pleading, contributes to an embodied composite on the early modern stage of suffering virgins, mothers, and intercessors that includes the heroines of *The Winter's Tale*. Included in this motif are Leontes' initial dismissal of Paulina, pleading for Hermione, as “Dame Partlet;” Hermione's visibly pregnant form as her chastity is questioned; and the language of suffering and martyrdom that Paulina, like Isabella from *Measure for Measure*, employs to bring her fortitude into relief. Before examining the individual plays in more depth, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the only partial saintliness of these heroines. The taint already present in their speaking out of righteous motives only intensifies with Portia's later vengeance toward Shylock, Isabella's arguable selfishness in refusing to exchange her virginity for her brother's life, and her and Hermione's concluding silence and possible acquiescence to the men who had treated them so horribly. Although in some cases, this imperfection coincides with early modern conceptions of Marian identity, this identity is by no means allegorical, embedded instead in power and rhetorical dynamics as complex and variable as the religious landscape in which the plays are performed.

I

As a figure of Marian intercession, Portia demonstrates her greatest eloquence, albeit ineffectively for her immediate purpose--swaying Shylock--in the “quality of mercy” speech. However impressive her rhetorical form about mercy dropping as the gentle rain from heaven, being twice blessed, and being enthroned in the hearts of kings, her turn to pathos in the speech becomes so comparatively personal and direct that it seems as if it could have come from Isabella to Angelo in the privacy of his chambers rather than being declaimed in a crowded courtroom:

in the course of justice, none of us
 Shall see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy (4.1.196-99).

Espinosa writes of Portia's intercession for Antonio, though unrequested, enacting the hope in medieval Catholicism of Marian intercession at the time of one's death. This hope is alluded to, he states, in Gratiano's address to Shylock, "Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,/ Thou makest thy knife keen.Can no prayers pierce thee?" (4.1.121-25). The line, he indicates, echoes a line that Thomas Lodge attributes to Mary at the site of the *pietà*: "Let the voice of my complaints pierce the heavens" (64). Yet, as Espinosa argues, it is no particular rhetorical eloquence, much less a plea for mercy, that saves Antonio, but rather what Karen Newman refers to as a "verbal quibble" similar to the antics of Lancelot Gobbo that hold Shylock to no more or less than the letter of the bond (72). At least, that is where it would have stood until Portia's decidedly less than merciful advocacy of the confiscation of his goods and the forfeit of his life, were it not for the mercy of the Duke. It seems doubtful that the ensuing forced conversion at the supposed mercy of Antonio could any more have been ignored on Shakespeare's post-expulsion stage than it can in a post-Holocaust context today. This collective vengeance notwithstanding, Espinosa argues that Portia might still have swayed the Duke into being merciful, even as she herself failed to exemplify mercy in the courtroom.

Perhaps Portia can be seen to follow her own advice in the aftermath of the ring test upon forgiving Bassanio for giving away the ring. Surely, Antonio's proposed forfeit, this time of his soul, rather than his body, should Bassanio be tempted again to give away the ring, implies his agreement to no longer compete with her for Bassanio's affections. In a reference pertinent to the Marian persona, Espinosa cites Jean Howard's argument that the ring test depicts Portia as married virgin who can "set the terms" of her marriage's eventual consummation (76). Not only does this give her the control that she lacked in the casket test, but also, it presents Portia as something other than the roles of the proverbial maid, wife, or widow, which several of the women in *Measure for Measure*, sometimes with Marian echoes, belie.

II

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's eloquence in imploring mercy resonates most soundly within the Marian persona, even as she

pronounces it when disguised as a man, thus shielding her courtroom audience from *seeing* her as a female advocate. In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella embodies intercession in her speech *and* her appearance as a woman, beginning with her first visit to Angelo's chambers. More still than Portia in the courtroom, Isabella argues with incredible persuasion for the virtues of mercy and the efficacy of leaders who practice it. Although initially reluctant to speak at all, Isabella, similar to Portia, declaims mercy as greater than the crown, sword, truncheon, and judge's robe. Like Portia, she further appeals to divinely inspired empathy, here more explicitly Christian than the address in the Venetian courtroom:

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made. (2.2.78-85)

Although already objectified in the eyes of Lucio for even showing her face and speaking to a man, as attested to by his opening lines, "Hail, virgin, if you be/ As those cheek roses proclaim you are no less"(1.4.16-17), Isabella nonetheless appeals to Angelo in both senses of the word as her arguments turn him inward toward his personal faults:

Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life. (2.2.141-6)

In the wonder and intimacy of a confessor moving a penitent to an anagnoritic realization of his sins, Isabella moves Angelo not only to recognize his lust—"she speaks, and 'tis such sense/ That my sense breeds with it," he muses in a notably carnal figure of speech (2.2.146-47)-- but also, ironically, to recognize his lust for her:

Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
And pitch our evils there? (2.2.175-79)

Although in this scene, Isabella, like Portia, ultimately fails to persuade, her inability to convince Angelo to pardon Claudio is not necessarily the limit on the reinvention of Marian intercession as Espinosa sees it. Yes, she becomes subject to Angelo's advances, her brother's request that she sleep with Angelo anyway, and the belief that Claudio had been executed. Yet Isabella exemplifies intercessory prayer in all its redemptive power first in her offer to "bribe" Angelo with sincere prayers (2.2.152) and more notably in her pleading, as requested by Mariana, for clemency for Angelo. In fact, in moving from the pleas for justice against Angelo at the city gates to pleading instead for mercy, Isabella hardly can make her supplications more selfless and compassionate. Mariana's request that she kneel on behalf of Angelo already asks Isabella to communicate a complete change of heart. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century editors, who have added kneeling to the first folio's notably lean stage directions, have thus required of Isabella an otherwise optional pose, supplementing her eventual words of mercy with the certainty of a gesture that suggests the aforementioned images of the Annunciation or the Seven Sorrows. In the world of the play, the sight alone of her kneeling at the gates of Catholic Vienna might thus have credibly swayed the Duke into preserving Angelo's life, much as Portia may have persuaded the Venetian Duke into sparing that of Shylock.

The stage tradition of Isabella kneeling at the city gates often includes her doppelgänger and willing counterpart in the bed trick, the fittingly named Mariana, joining her in kneeling. Editors beginning with John Payne Collier have inserted a direction for Mariana to kneel before the Duke as she confesses her consummation with Angelo. Desmond Davis's 1979 performance for the BBC television series accordingly depicts Mariana (Jacqueline Pearce) so kneeling, as does Robert Falls' 2013 production at The Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Bob Komar's 2006 film adaptation set on a contemporary army base, where kneeling would be

less common in addressing one's superiors, nonetheless depicts Mariana (Emma Agerwald) kneeling to punctuate the following clause:

As this is true,
Let me in safety raise me from my knees,
Or else forever be confixed here,
A marble monument! (5.1.236-9)

Either way, Mariana alludes to Marian iconography as she swears to the truth of her declaration. Editors beginning with Samuel Johnson have inserted a direction for Mariana to kneel again in Act 5, after she has married Angelo and returns to plead for his life, and just before she importunes Isabella to kneel with her:

Isabel,
Sweet Isabel, do yet but kneel by me!
Hold up your hands; say nothing;
I'll speak all. (5.1.430-2)

Although the Komar film breaks away, in this scene, from any further kneeling, portraying both Mariana and Isabella pleading while standing, the Davis and Falls productions adhere to the direction, originating with Nicholas Rowe, for Isabella to kneel alongside Mariana. David Bevington refers to Isabella's kneeling not as optional, but rather, as "one of the play's climactic theatrical gestures around which the resolution of the plot evolves" (111-12). The Falls production makes the most of the action, not only in having Isabella kneel, but also in featuring the gesture in a literal spotlight image as part of the play's publicity. In the following photo composite, a youthful Isabella (Alejandra Escalante) kneels, holding a rosary, amid the vice of a late 1970s Times Square.

THE “LOCAL HABITATION” OF MARIAN INTERCESSION IN
SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS OF JUSTICE AND MERCY



Because in the Falls production, the climactic kneeling scene occurs when Isabella and Mariana are still dressed as each other, the image in the composite is closer to an earlier instance of Isabella kneeling: during her initial interview with Angelo, as she pleads for Claudio’s life. Although traditional stage directions require no kneeling in this scene (nor a few still more notable actions, such as Angelo’s initiation of a near-rape), the blocking in the Falls production illustrates her later complaint that no matter “how I persuaded, how I prayed, and kneel’d,” (5.1.94), Angelo would not spare Claudio except in exchange for her virginity.

In performances, such as those by Falls and Davis, that feature not only the dual rising of Isabella and Mariana at the Duke’s command, but also an action not specified in the stage directions—namely, Angelo’s earlier kneeling in acknowledgement of all he had done wrong--the two women, but especially Isabella, visually suggest the aforementioned Virgin or Mother of Mercy, who in standing, protects kneeling supplicants. Pertinent to the setting of *Measure of Measure*, Germanic examples of the *Schutzmantel* Madonna, in which angels sometimes extend Mary’s cloak as she holds the Christ child, include the Viennese *Schutzmantel* Madonna as part of the Albrecht Altar and Gregor Erhart’s sculpted *Schutzmantel* Madonna in Austria’s Frauenstein Sanctuary. Duffy indicates that although the motif of the *Maria Misericordia* is not specifically English, it is present in English Books of Hours in Latin prayers that link Mary’s sorrows and salvific intercession:

The mother of mercy was one of Mary's most resonant medieval titles, unforgettably carved, painted, or engraved, extending her sheltering cloak over the suppliant faithful and enshrined in the most haunting of Marian prayers, the "Salve Regina." All over Europe the singing of the "Salve" each night after compline had become a popular devotion, and English testators left bequests for lights, incense and musical accompaniment to dignify this most tender of tributes to the Mother of Mercy. (*Stripping* 264)

Surely in the implied gesture throughout *Measure for Measure's* dialogue, and the intensification of not one, but two Marian figures pleading for the pardon of an avowed transgressor, the Salve Regina is evoked.

Yet in her particular suffering, including the possibility of escaping Angelo's advances only to enter into an unwanted marriage with the Duke, Isabella is still more explicitly depicted as hagiographic and inspirational. Helen Hackett writes of the perceived virtue of heroines in early modern romances precisely *because* they suffer unreasonably. In the same way that she cautions that cross-dressing might have been seen as more of a mortification to early modern readers, based on the lives of Marina, Theodora, and Eugenia from *The Golden Legend*, than a sign, as we see it today, of claiming otherwise male agency, Hackett cautions, in relation to suffering, against imposing contemporary definitions of female virtue. She argues that we should instead reconsider "iconographies of martyrdom and sanctity" as marks of grace and fortitude, rather than defeat (32). To this end, consider Isabella's initial refusal of Angelo:

were I under the terms of death,
The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame. (2.4.99-103)

Her refusal anticipates that of Volpone's Celia, who states her preference to be a martyr, drink poison, eat burning coals, and have her skin flayed rather than sleep with Volpone to increase her husband's fortunes.

More than masochistic fantasies or an overdetermination of virginity and chastity, these comments mirror the heroines' real sufferings, brought upon them through no fault of their own. Their references to suffering and martyrdom thus meld the concerns of late medieval piety--for example, their resonance with the Roman martyrs as recorded in *The Golden Legend*--with a range of seventeenth-century pieties, from Isabella's desire for more strict monastic vows to Angelo's decidedly Puritan precision. Yet despite all of Isabella's discussion of the fate of her and Claudio's souls, neither she nor the Duke, disguised as the friar, mention earthly suffering benefiting her in the afterlife. Ron Rittgers has written of the development in late medieval piety, and notably among mystics such as Mechtild of Magdeburg, of interpreting suffering, particularly in its bodily forms, as being "salvific" in that it can reduce one's later purgatorial sufferings (83). Any benefit of Isabella's suffering, however, seems less salvific and more in accord with what Rittgers identifies as a "redemptive" understanding in line with earlier medieval consolation literature and later lay piety influenced by Martin Luther (154). Isabella's trials accordingly bring her closer to her own biases: namely, to anything self-serving in her desire for Angelo's conviction. Thus, although in the bed trick, Isabella, along with Mariana, appears to become something other than a "maid, wife, or widow," and in so doing, gains the ability to negotiate justice, she ultimately sacrifices her desires in the interest of mercy.

III

The Winter's Tale, like *Measure for Measure*, embodies Marian iconography at the moment of grace, inspiring anything from skepticism to awe at Hermione's reappearance after every indication that she had died. This apparent resurrection, Bevington asserts, crowns a host of "wonders that seem to go beyond the powers of speech to utter or of theatre to present them" (202). But Hermione's Marian qualities begin far sooner in her too-successful intercession that Leontes begs of her to get Polixenes to stay. Moving Leontes to reason, following Polixenes' consent, that the only other time she spoke "to better purpose" was her consent to marry him (1.2.104), Hermione nonetheless becomes subject to Leontes' paranoid suspicions. Grown by the next scene to a "goodly bulk" (1.2.27),

the pregnant Hermione, Marian-like in her blamelessness and condition, seems only to verify, in Leontes' eyes, that Polixenes has made him a cuckold, that Polixenes is the father, and that she conspired with Camillo to murder him.

Just as Mariana intensifies Isabella's Marian qualities in *Measure for Measure*, so, in *The Winter's Tale*, does Paulina embody Marian-like intercession as she defends the imprisoned Hermione's chastity and good name. "He must be told on't, and he shall," Paulina declares, "The office becomes a woman best" (2.2.31-32). Bringing Perdita both so that he can see her likeness to him and because his newborn daughter might move him to clemency, Paulina becomes subject instead to a salvo of Leontes' gendered attacks ranging from an "audacious lady" (2.3.43), a "mankind witch" and "most intelligencing bawd" (2.3.67-68), a "gross hag" (2.2.107), a "Lady Margery (2.2.159), " and a "dame Partlet" who has "unrooted" Antigonus (2.2.75) to "a callat of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband,/ And now baits me!" (2.2.90-91). Paulina, in protesting Hermione's innocence, employs language reminiscent of martyrdom to illustrate the griefs that Leontes has caused:

What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?
 What wheels? racks? fires? what flaying? boiling?
 In leads or oils? what old or newer torture
 Must I receive, whose every word deserves
 To taste of thy most worst? (3.2.175-79)

Having been swayed by the truth of her speeches only after his rejection of the Oracle, his indictment of Hermione, and the news that both Hermione and Mamillius have died, Leontes now dismisses Paulina's apology for speaking too harshly, acknowledging simply, "Thou didst speak but well/ When most the Truth" (3.2.232-33). Paulina's suffering, soon to derive not only from a sense of injustice for Hermione, but also from the loss of Antigonus, surely contributes to how Leontes will come to accept her in the intervening 16 years: as a welcome and continuing goad to his conscience.

But more than in persuasion, the play's most visible Marian echoes occur in what Espinosa, among others, identifies as the miracle and wonder of the veiled Hermione being returned as a living statue. However

undeserved the grace to Leontes, however unwelcome the reunion might be to the unspeaking Hermione, the scene appears to be the last step in the repentance to which Paulina has moved Leontes. Hermione's return thus refashions his guilt-ridden speculation that, should he remarry, the act would cause Hermione's "sainted spirit/ Again possess her corpse, and on this stage... appear soul-vexed, and begin 'Why to me'?" (5.1.57-60). Dolan has written about Hermione's spectre in act 5 as the arrival of one who is undead: a possibility that fulfills suggestions, such as in this line, that she both *had* been dead and inhabited a universe, such as one that included Purgatory, that allowed her to return as a ghost. Analogous, in Dolan's schema, to the myth of the "vanishing Catholic" whom certain early moderns either feared or hoped would return, the very thought of Hermione's return similarly inspires both fear or possibly hope of vengeance (225). Dolan acknowledges the vengeful possibilities in early modern exempla about the Blessed Virgin, for example, to those who deface her statue. Yet although Hermione speaks no words of forgiveness nor anything else to Leontes upon her return, thus making their reconciliation enigmatic at best, neither does she, as the living statue of the sorrowful mother, condemn nor confront him as he feared.

Hermione's silence in this scene bespeaks the miraculous and incomprehensible, even as it leaves unresolved her feelings toward Leontes and operates counter to her and Paulina's earlier eloquence. Bevington sees the scene as a statement on the magic of theatre:

The climactic event of Hermione's statue coming to life is suffused with a sense of theatrical magic. Paulina is the mistress of ceremonies, the stand-in here for the dramatist as controller of the action and deviser of stage illusion. Such a magic requires imaginative participation by the viewers....Audiences know that this magnificent staging effect is a theatrical contrivance.....They must experience a "belief" in the power and veracity of theatrical illusion.
(203-04)

Donald Hedrick has interpreted the scene, alternately, as an example of the "embodied practices," or "stage magic" (649), including coney catching, sleights of hand, and other ruses dependent on distraction and

inattention that he has coined *magic*₂. He lists Hermione's statue among the wonders that are really "legerdemain" (649), and signal a shift in Jacobean tragedy from the actual wonder that brings into relief real truth, and tricks of the trade that begin to entertain a newly commercial theatre. Surely, that characterization fits with the most rational interpretation of the scene: of course, that Paulina had kept the living Hermione hidden for 16 years until the right moment to bring her back. Although the existence of cheap illusions compellingly supports Hedrick's argument on capital, inattention blindness, and the end of tragedy, Hermione's statue nonetheless elicits something more authentic between the poles of tragedy and comedy, theatrical illusion and *magic*₂, and justice and mercy.

David Beauregard has identified in Hermione's return a scene of wonder and grace, culminating Leontes' completion of sacramental contrition, confession, and satisfaction (109). Hermione's Marian identity, of course, is most potent in Perdita's supplication before the maternal statue in Paulina's chapel:

give me leave,
And do not say 'tis superstition, that
I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady,
Dear queen, that ended when I but began,
Give me that hand of yours to kiss. (5.3.46-49)

The grace implied in Hermione's return appears in her wordless embrace of Leontes and, befitting her Marian persona, in Paulina's direction to Leontes to "awake your faith" and in this moment suggestive of miraculous resurrection, to "Bequeath to death your numbness; for from him/ Dear life redeems you" (5.3.113-14). The miracle of the scene certainly can be, as Bevington suggests, the magic of theatrical illusion by an audience, onstage or otherwise, who is willing to accept it. But the authenticity that makes an audience so willing may have roots still deeper in that audience's local and religious past. In Shakespeare's plays of justice and mercy, that authenticity includes the necessity of remorse, the desire for a second chance, the possibility of true change, and the wonder, embodied by echoes of the feminine advocate, of grace beyond all reason, and intercession beyond all deserving.

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