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Judging Forgiveness:  
Hannah Arendt, W. H. Auden, and  
*The Winter's Tale*

Julia Reinhard Lupton

The sounded note is the restored relation.  
—W. H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*<sup>1</sup>

*Das Licht der Öffentlichkeit verdunkelt alles*  
("The light of the public obscures everything").  
—Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*<sup>2</sup>

May Adonai cause His face to shine upon you  
and be gracious unto you.  
—Blessing for children, Jewish home liturgy<sup>3</sup>

**I**N LATE 1959 AND EARLY 1960, W. H. Auden and Hannah Arendt had a brief exchange on the subject of forgiveness; their dialogue, conducted in part in response to dramatic literature, resulted in a life-long friendship, including a rebuffed marriage proposal from Wystan to Hannah after the death of Arendt's husband Heinrich Blücher in 1970. The two met when Auden reviewed *The Human Condition* for the journal *Encounter* in 1959, and Auden contacted Arendt by telephone to communicate his admiration.<sup>4</sup> In 1971, Arendt dedicated her essay, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture" to Auden, and she wrote a eulogy for the poet when he died in 1973.<sup>5</sup> Yet Arendt never claimed Auden as one of her most intimate friends, and they disagreed on the matter of forgiveness. For Auden, forgiveness (the noun) is an internal state that is necessarily betrayed by presentation on stage, where "forgiveness requires manifestation in action."<sup>6</sup> For Arendt, on the other hand, forgiving (the verb) is an action that always involves the speech and comportment of a plurality of persons in this world, its action-character rendering it a resource for both politics and drama.<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, I take up the case of *The Winter's Tale* in order to consider the stakes of the Auden-Arendt exchange. Does the injured wife Hermione actually forgive her husband Leontes in the reconciliation scene of Act V? Although she embraces him, her words are reserved

instead for their daughter Perdita. Either she has manifested a forgiveness whose silence conforms to Auden's ideal of a forgiveness that is essentially silent, or she remains at least partially estranged from him, as occurs in some stagings and critical readings.<sup>8</sup> Using Arendt as a guide to judgment (both judgment *in* the play and judgment *of* the play), I argue that Hermione can be imagined to withhold or delay forgiveness, a demurral that calls attention to the public rather than private character of forgiving in a play whose ardent courtship of theological themes remains firmly grounded in this world.<sup>9</sup> Leontes is not only "a man *in* dark times," to cite the title of Arendt's 1968 collection of biographical profiles, but the *author* of that darkness, a responsibility to be considered in any tallying of the play's final settlements. Delaying forgiveness does not mean, however, that the play is merely bleak, ironic, or without future. Although forgiving in the Arendtian sense does not, I argue, happen on stage and before our eyes and ears, Hermione's public blessing of their daughter Perdita prepares the way for forgiveness within a larger social and environmental scene of recursive and abounding acknowledgment.<sup>10</sup>

The exchange between the philosopher and the poet concerns the meeting of two very different but also kindred minds, Jewish and Christian, sounding their real divergences around the question of whether forgiveness belongs to law and judgment (Arendt's position) or represents instead the overcoming of the judicial outlook (Auden's attitude). Their exchange has been taken up by political philosophers and legal scholars considering the politics of forgiveness in contemporary settings, such as national truth and reconciliation proceedings and acts of amnesty.<sup>11</sup> Their exchange also has literary implications, ranging from how we read Auden's poetic corpus to how we evaluate dramas of forgiveness, from the *Oresteia* and *The Winter's Tale* to *The Good Wife*. Finally, in Arendt's work judgment manifests both an aesthetic and a political dimension. Arendt follows Kant in taking judgment as the faculty that allows the individual to move from evaluating works of art to participating in political deliberation. The operation of judgment reveals "that art and politics, their conflicts and tensions notwithstanding, are interrelated and even mutually dependent."<sup>12</sup> Judgment, like art, implies a commons: an "enlarged mentality" that rests on "an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement."<sup>13</sup> It is in search of clearing, preserving, and reanimating this commons around and for human plurality that Arendt insists on the public character of forgiveness, not as the rejection of judgment, but as its affirmation.

## I. Forgiveness, Between Friends

Arendt's comments on forgiving and promising occur at the end of the long section of *The Human Condition* on action, the third and most significant form of the *vita activa* in the triad formed by labor (efforts aimed at meeting the needs of life), work (the fabrication of artifacts that build a common world capable of surviving individual human lives), and action (contingent deeds usually involving speech that occur among human beings and that usher in a consequential web of relationships, stories, and institutions). Each of the three modes of activity suffers from an insufficiency that requires redemption from outside its own repertoire: the forms of duration fabricated by work supplement labor's relentless ebb and flow, while action's production of human meaning responds to the instrumentality and isolation that alienate work. If work saves labor from repetition, and action saves work from a lack of meaning, what saves action from the terror of irreversibility? Arendt's answer is forgiving:

The case of action and action's predicaments is altogether different. Here, the remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself. The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what one was doing—is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. . . . Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover. . . . Both faculties . . . depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas labor finds its salvation in work, and work is completed in action, action must look within its own domain of significant speech to find a solution to the contingencies that can thicken the "web of relationships" spawned by action into an action-inhibiting entanglement of unintended consequences.<sup>15</sup> It is the nature of action that the agent cannot know in advance the outcome of her deeds. Not only does she inadvertently reveal who she is to others in the present time of action (manifesting what Arendt calls the daemon, "looking over [the actor's] shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters" [*HC* 179–80]), but the full significance of that performance is only delivered retroactively, in the form of the later consequences of an action and their recording,

evaluation, and narrativization as history: "its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act" (*HC*233). And forgiving itself repeats this process of inadvertent disclosure: in forgiving, "we are dependent upon others, to whom we appear in a distinctness which we ourselves are unable to perceive" (*HC* 243). The action of forgiving, which precisely as an act also issues in unpredictable consequences, might in some cases itself require forgiving, if for example pardon leads to abuse or amnesia.<sup>16</sup>

Auden reviewed *The Human Condition* in *Encounter* in June, 1959. Praising the book for seeming "to have created a world for which I have been waiting all my life," he devotes part of his commentary to Section 33:

In an admirable sentence, Miss Arendt indicates the relation between law and forgiveness.

Men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish, and they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable.<sup>17</sup>

Yet these same lines clearly bothered Auden, who had returned to the Anglican Communion in 1940.<sup>18</sup> A few months after his review of *The Human Condition* appeared, he published his essay, "The Fallen City: Some Reflections on Shakespeare's *Henry IV*." Here he presents forgiveness as a form of *agape*, which "requires that we love our enemies, do good to those who injure us, and this command is unconditional."<sup>19</sup> Under these terms, he avers, drama can't really depict forgiveness, which is an internal state and not an action; on stage, "the spirit of forgiveness" can only appear more brutally as "the act of pardon," a legal process rather than an emotional attitude. Auden denies law the power to forgive: "The law cannot forgive, for the law has not been wronged, only broken; only persons can be wronged." He then restates Arendt's dictum, but replaces the word "forgive" with the word "pardon": "The law can pardon, but it can only pardon what it has the power to punish."<sup>20</sup> Whereas Arendt's interests were primarily political, concerning forgiveness as a form of public action tightly related to judgment and law, Auden's approach is both theological and psychological, addressing forgiveness as the charitable expression of "a state of feeling." Both Auden and Arendt turn to the New Testament for their accounts of forgiveness, but whereas Auden dedicates his thinking to its Christian character, Arendt aims to understand forgiving "in a strictly secular sense" (*HC* 238). Auden may have been intrigued by Arendt's forthright citations of "Jesus of Nazareth" (the nomenclature flags the historical Jesus and not Jesus the Christ or messiah), but he is also aware that her interpretation of forgiveness is not ultimately a Christian one.<sup>21</sup>

Auden communicated his concerns directly to Arendt, who followed up with a formal typed letter dated February 14, 1960 (St. Valentine's Day). There, she takes issue with several points raised in "The Fallen City." First, she uses the Gospels against Auden to argue that even in Christianity, forgiveness is not unconditional: "Jesus said, 'If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.'"<sup>22</sup> Whereas Auden wants forgiveness to flow freely regardless of the attitude of the one being forgiven, Arendt insists on the transactional character of the gesture, which demands consideration of the comportment of the transgressor as well as the moral judgment, not just the moral attitude of the absolver.

Arendt goes on to concede that forgiving and pardon are distinct, pardon being a judicial act involving release from punishment and forgiving involving more intangible but nonetheless real phenomena of personhood, such as reputation, self-understanding, respect, responsibility, and acknowledgment, as well as the chance for new and renewed conversations and alliances that take flight from these attributes of the public person. As she puts it later in the letter, in what is perhaps the key thesis of her *responsa* to Auden, "Forgiving does not aim at the destruction but on the contrary at the restoration of the persons involved and of the relationship between them." Charity, however, like law, "looks upon all with an equal eye, makes no distinctions, has no regard for the person." She finds unsolicited forgiveness "impertinent, or at least conceited," implying the forgiver's invulnerability to injury. She concludes that charity actually resembles pardon more than forgiving in becoming "the point where the law breaks down; the man who receives it is no longer judged solely according to the law." She had begun this paragraph by conceding the difference between forgiving and pardoning, but she refuses to merge forgiving as action into forgiveness as attitude and affect. Instead, she sees in charity a surreptitious or disavowed form of action that, like judicial pardon, places itself beyond judgment and the law.

Above all, Arendt is committed to maintaining a tight relationship between forgiving and judging; charity's weakness is its lack of discretion. Judgment comes to the fore in the next paragraph, which begins with Arendt's admission, "Of course I am prejudiced, namely against charity. But let me at least make a stand for my prejudices." She then tries to make the case for this prejudice in favor of judgment and against its supersession or suspension. Auden associates forgiveness with *humility*, while Arendt allies forgiving with *pride*, the courage to judge the actions of others despite self-doubt: "Humility and conceit are two sides of the same matter, both wrong because the result of self-reflection. Pride, on the other hand, which means here to insist that the power

of judgment remains unimpaired, is not undermined by the gnawing doubt of self-reflection about my own potential or actual sins, cannot be destroyed by the act of forgiving because loss of pride and loss of 'personality' somehow coincide." In *The Human Condition*, Arendt calls this affirmation of personality *respect*: "a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us" (HC243). The worldliness implied by respect both inserts a distance between persons and asserts a common ground for their exchange of words and glances. Respect means "to look again," and forgiving is a form of retrospection, a reassessment of past actions in the light of the person standing before judgment in the zone constituted by the mutually affirmed possibility of ascertaining what is right.

In her response to Auden, Arendt is willing to sever forgiveness and pardon, which she had too quickly equated in *The Human Condition*, but not to marry forgiveness to charity, and above all, not to divorce forgiveness from judgment. Judgment for Arendt is the pivot and bridge between thinking and acting. Judging is decisive mental work with and against norms and values embodied in the specific shared situation delivered by human action and submitted anew, by some moment of crisis or confrontation, for fresh evaluation. Pace Auden, *forgiving is not the refusal to judge; it is a form of judging*. Why? Because forgiving involves the evaluation of persons and particulars in response to the dangers of either retribution (the endless repetition of injury) or stalemate (the inhibition of action in the face of the burden of the past). Like judgment and as a species of judgment, forgiving happens in the presence of others, engaging not only forgiver and forgiven, but also a larger public assembly, whether the circle of family and friends or the court of opinion.<sup>23</sup>

Derrida, whose position is closer to Auden's than to Arendt's, dismissively associates "the theater of forgiveness" with "hypocrisy, calculation, or mimicry."<sup>24</sup> Arendt would respond by insisting that forgiving manifests the same contingency as the actions it is designed to absolve: "the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character of action" (HC241). Arendt does not refer explicitly to drama in this section of *The Human Condition*, but her final footnote just before Section 33 evokes tragedy:

Where human pride is still intact, it is tragedy rather than absurdity which is taken to be the hallmark of human existence. Its greatest representative is Kant, to whom the spontaneity of acting, and the concomitant faculties of practical reason, including force of judgment, remain the outstanding qualities of man, even though his action falls into the determinism of natural law and his judg-

ment cannot penetrate the secret of absolute reality (the *Ding an sich*). Kant had the courage to acquit man from the consequences of his deed, insisting solely on the purity of his motives, and this saved him from losing faith in man and his potential greatness. (HC235n)

This fiercely concentrated footnote delivers the key components of forgiving for Arendt, including pride (self-respect, not self-love), acting (the spontaneity of human freedom), judgment (the pivot between thinking and acting), and acquittal (the capacity to release agents from the burden of their mistakes). These motifs are all forcefully gathered under the rubric of tragedy. Action is tragic when the agent's deeds deliver consequences that reverse his intentions, as when Oedipus, in attempting to prevent the oracle from coming to pass, unwittingly fulfills it. In the *Oresteia* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, acquittal both emerges within tragic action and implies an egress from the finality of tragic consequentiality, releasing the heroes from the terror of their deeds. Arendt's footnote to Kant signals tragedy as another scene for the exploration of action, its risks, its judgment, and its acquittal. In this footnote, Arendt anticipates and rebuts Auden's claim that forgiving can't be staged. The fact that forgiving *can* be staged (as it is in Act Four of *King Lear*, for example) does not mean, however, that it always is. This brings me to *The Winter's Tale*.

## II. *The Winter's Tale*: The Good Wife and the Limits of Forgiveness

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes, King of Sicily, overcome by pathological jealousy, accuses his wife Hermione of sleeping with their guest, his boyhood friend Polixenes. He orders his steward Camillo to poison Polixenes, who instead escapes thanks to the scruples of the servant. Enraged, he separates Hermione from their son Mamillius and throws his wife into prison, where she prematurely delivers a baby girl, Perdita. Leontes sends a team to the Oracle at Delphos for a divine ruling, and calls his wife into court during her period of confinement, having already sent her baby off to be exposed, like Oedipus, in "some remote and desert place" (II.iii.175).<sup>25</sup> The court proceedings are a sham, and even the oracle's declaration of the queen's innocence does not dislodge the king's *idée fixe*, only the announcement of their son's death, killed by "mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed" (III.ii.142) rouses him from his delusion. But Hermione herself collapses and appears to die; in fact, she has been taken into seclusion by her lady, Paulina, while the baby Perdita is discovered by Bohemian shepherds who raise her to young womanhood.



In the climax of the story, Hermione, posing as a statue in Paulina's chapel-gallery, descends from her pedestal at her friend's request:

PAULINA:       *Music*, awake her—strike!  
 (*To Hermione*) 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;  
 Strike all that look upon with marvel—come,  
 I'll fill your grave up. Stir—nay, come away,  
 Bequeath to Death your numbness, for from him  
 Dear life redeems you. (*To Leontes*) You perceive she stirs.  
       *Hermione descends*  
 Start not; her actions shall be holy as  
 You hear my spell is lawful. Do not shun her  
 Until you see her die again, for then  
 You kill her double. Nay, present your hand.  
 When she was young you wooed her; now in age  
 Is she become the suitor?  
 LEONTES:       O, she's warm!  
 If this be magic, let it be an art  
 Lawful as eating.  
 POLIXENES:    She embraces him. (V.iii.99–111)

In the final lines of the play, Leontes specifically requests pardon from both Hermione and Polixenes ("Both your pardons / That e'er I put between your holy looks / My ill suspicion" [V.iii.147–9]), but no verbal answer is provided. Auden reads their silence as assent: "In the simplest type of repentance, Leontes asks pardon of Hermione and Polixenes, and they don't even bother to reply. Mamillius is dead, Antigonus is dead, sixteen years have passed: all are remembered in forgiveness. Forgiveness is not in forgetting, but in remembering."<sup>26</sup> Auden takes it for granted—or wants to take it for granted—that Leontes is in fact forgiven within the time of the play, although he also sees the play's many losses as recollected within that act and thus newly present before us. The two most influential and significant readers of forgiveness in the play, Stanley Cavell (1988) and Sarah Beckwith (2012), are more alert to the ambiguity of Hermione's silence than Auden is, yet they ultimately seem to concur with Auden's reading of the play's ending. Recognizing discord, Cavell suggests that this "ceremony of union" is also "a ceremony of separation" in which Hermione's silence might manifest her possession of "a life beyond his."<sup>27</sup> Like Auden, Cavell intuits forgiveness, but, unlike Auden, he understands its flow as accommodating a halting, thawing rhythm. Paulina's lines, a series of stage directions, indicate Hermione's own slowness to move, her hesitation manifesting the action character of her decision-making. If her statuesque form is

revealed in the inner stage, the curtained opening between the flanking entry doors at the back of the stage, Hermione could move backwards rather than forwards, into the dark interior of the tiring house, fleeing the public glare that had before proved so dangerous to her and hers.

For Beckwith, who draws on Arendt throughout her study, Hermione's action remains an open question: "None of the responses can be predicted, they can only be risked." Even a rebuff, however, "would constitute a form of acknowledgement."<sup>28</sup> Cavell and Beckwith are careful not to attribute forgiveness to Hermione unequivocally, yet they also spirit it into their readings of the play. Thus Beckwith claims *The Winter's Tale* for "the grammar of forgiveness" (the title of her book), and Cavell poses the question, "Does the closing scene constitute forgiveness, Hermione's forgiveness of Leontes?" as essentially a rhetorical question, insofar as he shifts immediately back to Leontes as he who has allowed himself to accept forgiveness without considering Hermione's motives further.

Yet, if we agree with Arendt that forgiving involves speech, Hermione does not actually forgive Leontes in the time of the play. Indeed, Shakespeare calls attention to Hermione's silence: Camillo importunes, "She hangs about his neck [embraces him] — / If she pertains to life [if she is alive], let her speak too!" (V.iii.112–13). Touch communicates much of the scene's import, from the electric encounter expressed by Leontes' extraordinary "O, she's warm" to the embrace that joins the two; touch is enough for Auden, for whom forgiveness is fully compatible, indeed more deeply harmonious, with "silence and inaction" than with the drama of speech. But for Arendt, touch alone would likely not be enough to signal forgiveness.<sup>29</sup> In Arendt, the element of speech endows forgiving with its status as act, its affiliation with judgment, its call for witnesses, and its contribution to human history as a verbal record of deeds. If we accept that forgiving involves speech as well as intent and gesture, then Hermione cannot really be said to have forgiven Leontes in the time of the play. This is not an ironic, subversive, or postmodern reading of the play; it is simply an account of what the play provides. Shakespeare gives us the warmth of Hermione's extended hand and the bodily compass of her full embrace; but he also gives us her silence, and noisily remarks upon it ("let her speak too!"). To say that Hermione has not yet forgiven Leontes is no more inventive, suspicious, or contrarian than to claim that she has: both interpretations require readers and directors to make a judgment about what forgiveness is and whether it has taken place on stage, as part of their total response to and understanding of the play as a whole.

Why might Hermione put off forgiving? Auden reminds us of the human losses, and sees these as remembered, not forgotten, in the play's



Leontes' terrifying presence or made into instruments of his murderous will. This does not mean that some flickering of human action, in the form of Hermione's self-defense and Paulina's courageous advocacy, is not possible; the faltering character of that flickering, however, manifests in the cave of shadows to which Leontes, designer of dark times, has reduced *Öffentlichkeit*, the public realm of human appearing.<sup>31</sup>

In Section 33, Arendt brings up the possibility of radical evil as a limit to forgiveness:

It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offenses which, since Kant, we call "radical evil" and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. (HC 241)

Can Hermione forgive Leontes for crimes against persons other than herself? The deaths of Mamillius and Antigonus, indirectly caused by Leontes' actions, are not necessarily hers to forgive.<sup>32</sup> Also at stake are the crimes that Leontes committed against "the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power," effected when he made his dreams into the law of the land. These deeds do not raise Leontes to the status of the men on trial at Nuremberg who, Arendt tells Auden, were on her mind when she wrote this passage. His deeds do, however, remind us of the public character of Leontes's actions—deeds performed in public, but also against the very conditions of publicity. His crimes against politics reassert the importance of speech as act in the accomplishment of forgiving.

In place of Hermione's speech, however, Shakespeare gives us her silence, an active silence or leeway that affords a range of interpretations to actors, directors, and audiences as well as readers and critics. This leeway is spatial, concerning how she might extend herself from the graduated regions of withdrawal marked by the backstage, the discovery space, and the curtain's moving margins into the clearings drawn by the circle of witnesses on stage and the audience in the theater. Leeway is also temporal: she likely *will* forgive him, but only in that work of retelling that is promised beyond the bounds of the play. And leeway is also ethical and affective: what reserves and recesses of memory and want will the snow queen keep between the couple as a buffer against betrayal as they move forward into the final stage of their marriage? Hermione's

silence allows her to practice forgiving as a species of judging; in Kevin Curran's Arendtian formulation, the final scene does not "reverse or undo judgment. Instead, these concluding events reimagine judgment, transforming it from something that proceeds according to the principles of retribution to a process that includes forgiveness."<sup>33</sup>

Arendt never wrote about *The Winter's Tale*, but in *Men in Dark Times*, she expresses sympathy for the crisis undergone by Rosa Luxemburg with her partner Leo Jogiches: "Their deadly serious quarrel, caused by Jogiches's brief affair with another woman and endlessly complicated by Rosa's furious reaction, was typical of their time and milieu, as was the aftermath, his jealousy, and her refusal for years to forgive him."<sup>34</sup> She asks that we take the public conditions of this apparently private crisis into consideration: "It was not 'blind and self-destructive jealousy' which caused the ultimate tragedy in their relations but war and years in prison, the doomed German revolution and the bloody end."<sup>35</sup> These comments suggest that Arendt might have granted Hermione some easement with respect to the time for forgiveness. My Hermione, not unlike Arendt's Rosa, is "the good wife" not in the classic sense of ceaseless self-sacrifice and unconditional love, but in the more measured and agential sense charted in the CBS television series, in which a politician's wife (Julianna Margulies), humiliated by her husband's crimes and misdemeanors, finds her way back into both public and family life through a series of inventive compromises.<sup>36</sup> Hermione can, like Cordelia, love Leontes according to her bond, but it may be presumptuous to expect more of her, and brave of Shakespeare to permit her a little more time.

At the end of Section 33, Arendt distinguishes the unconditional forgiveness that flows from love and the more qualified and judgmental forgiveness that proceeds from respect: "[W]hat love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs. Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politikē*, is a kind of 'friendship' without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us" (HC 243). Respect more than *eros* may reseal the bond between Leontes and Hermione; in touching and holding, they also begin to move away, not in a divorce but in search of new ways to relate to each other, to "[shake] hands as over a vast, and [embrace] as it were from the ends of opposed winds" (I.i.28–30).<sup>37</sup> Hermione's silence initiates this search.

### III. Hermione's Secular Benediction and the Politics of Blessing

Unlike Isabella in the controversial end of *Measure for Measure*, however, Hermione does speak again in the play, just not to Leontes. As the

assembled company awaits a word from the queen, Paulina breaks the ice by cueing up another scene:

*Paulina:*                               it appears she lives,  
 Though yet she speaks not. Mark a little while.  
*(To Perdita)* Please you to interpose, fair madam; kneel  
 And pray your mother's blessing. *(To Hermione)* Turn, good lady;  
 Our Perdita is found.

*Hermione:* You gods look down  
 And from your sacred vials pour your graces  
 Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own.  
 Where hast thou been preserved, where lived, how found  
 Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,  
 Knowing by Paulina that the oracle  
 Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved  
 Myself to see the issue. (V.iii.121–28)

Called to speak by Camillo, Polixenes, and Paulina, Hermione finds her voice when her daughter kneels before her and asks her blessing. The opportunity to bless Perdita allows ambivalent affect to overflow as affirmative speech. The marriage covenant has been renewed by the act of touching hands, emblem of marital consent, but its promises have not yet been realized in human action, which requires Hermione's engagement with the wider sphere of relationships beyond the intimacy of the couple alone. That wider engagement, what Curran calls "the emergence of a participatory community . . . of judgment," is signaled by her blessing of Perdita.<sup>38</sup>

In acts of blessing, one figure (parent, neighbor, priest, rabbi) calls on powers outside herself (God, gods, or their secular equivalent, the precarious mix of human and natural transactions that contribute, or fail to contribute, to health, wealth, and well-being) to offer some safety and succor to the receiver of these good wishes. Blessing is a dramaturgy, involving kneeling, bowing, waving, or extending the hands as well as ritually heightened words that range from the formulaic to the freely poetic. Blessing often includes props: the raised glass or the slaughtered animal, the set table or the cleared one. Because blessing involves acknowledging the community's embeddedness in larger webs of dependency, blessings express not so much a gift economy as a *gift ecology*, the tenuous network of debts that link humans to each other and to other beings in relations of risk, need, love, labor, care, respect, and acknowledgment. Hermione's address to the gods composes mother and daughter in a shared attitude of thanksgiving for survival and hope for flourishing. The stage director and curator Paulina sets up the scene of blessing in order to prompt the queen to speak, to tune the play's ambience, and to initiate a therapy of acknowledgment.

In a stunning pair of essays on drama and benediction, literary theorist and Kant scholar Sanford Budick links blessing with both “an experience of being that is constituted by multidirectional recursive relations,” a flow he discovers in the place-based aesthetics of *Oedipus at Colonus*, and as a dramatic technique for discovering “the generative relation between passionately felt respect for an other’s moral being and love for that other,” an operation that he finds in *King Lear*’s scenes of blessing.<sup>39</sup> Opening cosmically, blessing acknowledges the speaker’s environmental situatedness; Budick defines blessing as a recursive exchange among persons and environments that “participates in the emergence of imagined being.”<sup>40</sup> This creaturely dimension of blessing is evoked by Arendt when she writes in *The Human Condition* of “‘the blessing or the joy’ of labor” (HC 106), and by Auden when he calls one of his poems “Thanksgiving for a Habitat.” Turning from the affordances of setting to the presence of other people, acts of benediction anoint human relationships; thus Arendt speaks of “the blessing of being together with other men.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, blessings are designed to manage the affective flow among these different forms of *capture* (by our bonds to other people) and *rapture* (by climate, season, locale, and the pathos of embodiment to which they return us). In this dynamic enlisting of settings and persons, benediction shares much with theater: blessing is a local form of drama, and drama is an evolved form of blessing.

Both blessing and forgiving imply a hierarchy, the passage of an empowering but also an empowered beneficence from one party (she who blesses or forgives) to the one who kneels to receive this action, in order to rise again newly released, enabled, or fortified. Both acts run the risk of what Arendt calls “impertinence,” implying the moral or social superiority of the dispenser. Both draw a politics out of theology: the politics of mutual recognition within a larger scene of dependence on forces greater than either party (history, the public realm, nature, cosmos). In forgiving, that larger scene enlists other people as witnesses, co-defendants, and collateral victims of past and present actions. In the case of blessing, the communal emphasis is also ecological, naming shared risks and vulnerabilities at threshold moments and in threshold spaces. (“Goodbye,” “adieu,” and “farewell” are blessings.) Blessing is the easier, more routinized, and more transparently positive action, while forgiving is more demanding, unusual, and potentially transformative. The ease of blessing, however, is deceptive, since its proximities with the curse indicate its destructive powers; in the Old Testament context, blessings and curses accompanied the signing of covenants and treaties, as incentives for compliance.<sup>42</sup> In *King Lear*, blessing and forgiving unfold simultaneously between father and daughter; in *The Winter’s Tale*,

an incomplete forgiveness between husband and wife dissolves into the blessing of daughter by mother, the gracious fluency of the latter rechanneling the tongue-tied difficulty of the former. Blessing in *The Winter's Tale* has a messianic function, preparing the ground for a forgiveness to come while calling attention to the fact that sometimes forgiveness is most conducive to transformation when it remains incipient rather than achieved.

Budick associates blessing with Kant's "respect for an other's moral being."<sup>43</sup> Recall that Arendt had associated respect with forgiving's less *eros*-driven, more discretionary applications. If Hermione is unable to forgive Leontes directly, out of the spontaneous overflowing of spousal love, blessing's inculcation of respect becomes a supplement to forgiveness. Just as work saves labor by introducing duration, action saves work by generating meaning, and forgiving saves action by offering release from the burden of consequence, blessing saves forgiving by affording another outlet for acknowledgement, allowing forgiving to preserve its commitment to judgment and justice. Arendt draws on theological language in discussing the concatenation of labor, work, and action: the durable things of the fabricator supplement the ebb and flow of labor "like a miracle," while the stories of biography and history respond to the instrumentality and isolation of work "like a miracle, like the revelation of divinity" (HC 236; emphasis added). If theology remains an analogy for Arendt (like a miracle, like epiphany), the recourse to religious language also indicates her willingness to reach beyond classical politics to fill out the repertoire of tools required to act in concert. Budick's "secular benediction" ("benediction of the human by the human") is implicitly Arendtian in the creativity of its turn to Kant, the integrity of its humanism, and the sublimated—messianic/ecumenical and philosophical/rational—character of its Judaism.<sup>44</sup>

Auden was a poet of blessing as well as forgiveness.<sup>45</sup> Although his lecture on *The Winter's Tale* takes forgiveness for granted, Auden's own multi-dimensional engagement with Shakespeare can be pressed to allow Hermione a respite from unconditional forgiveness, bidding her to seek reunion and repair by another path, the act and art of benediction. Whereas his lecture on *The Winter's Tale* seeks a forgiveness as unconditional as it is unexpressed, his reading of *The Tempest* in *The Sea and the Mirror* turns around Prospero's failings and his brother Antonio's irreconcilable negativity as well as Caliban's pariah status. The final lines of Caliban's speech dissolve the dream of a complete or "molar" pardon into the wider environmental field of blessing: "It is just here, among the ruins and the bones, that we may rejoice in the perfected Work which is not ours. Its great coherences stand out through our secular blur in



all their overwhelmingly righteous obligation; its voice speaks through our muffling banks of artificial flowers and unflinchingly delivers its authentic molar pardon; its spaces greet us with all their grand old prospect of wonder and width; the working charm is the full bloom of the unbothered state; the sounded note is the restored relation."<sup>46</sup> Although Auden's Caliban speaks of "pardon," it is one that issues not from man to man, but more cosmically, from the Creator to his creatures via the "wonder and width" of a creation whose fundamental quality consists in its being "not ours." Forgiveness is a theme here, but the speech-act itself is closer in form and flow to that of blessing, from the semi-hortative "we may rejoice" to the melting of musical, social, and locative harmonies in the final clause. *The sounded note is the restored relation*: does the *sounded note* belong to Shakespeare's play and Auden's poem, or to the cosmos itself? And does the *restored relation* obtain between persons (Prospero and Caliban, Alonso and Sebastian), or between man, world, and God? Auden has composed a blessing *about* forgiveness that runs the danger (as all of Auden's musings do) of confusing blessing *with* forgiveness. Read with Arendt in hand, however, Caliban's farewell can also lead us to reflect creatively on the differences that connect these neighboring entries in the political-theological playbook.<sup>47</sup>

Auden's readings of Shakespeare in the 1940s are marked by the crisis of betrayal, jealousy, and murderous rage instigated by the polyamory of his partner, Chester Kallman, in 1941. His readings of Falstaff and Hal and Antonio and Bassanio as proxies for Shakespeare and the Young Man, but also his visitation of strained forgiveness in *The Tempest* reflect this crisis.<sup>48</sup> His most powerful address of these issues, however, occurred in a Christmas letter written to Kallman at the end of 1941, in which Auden translates into prayer the pressure points of their relationship:

Because it is in you, a Jew, that I, a Gentile, inheriting an  
O-so-genteel anti-semitism, have found my happiness:  
As this morning I think of Bethlehem, I think of you.

.....

Because, suffering on your account the torments of sexual  
jealousy, I have had a glimpse of the infinite vileness of masculine  
conceit:

As this morning, I think of Joseph, I think of you.

.....

Because, on account of you, I have been, in intention, and  
almost in act, a murderer;

As this morning I think of Herod, I think of you.

.....

Because it is through you that God has chosen to show me  
my beatitude,

As this morning I think of the Godhead, I think of you.<sup>49</sup>

Is the poet asking forgiveness, granting forgiveness, or dissolving both actions in a Christmas benediction that takes each of that story's central references as gifts affording reflection, reconstitution, and re-covenanting? In his study *Auden and Christianity*, Arthur Kirsch notes the close relationship between what Auden understood to be his marriage to Kallman and his decision to return to the Anglican Communion. The letter itself, however, "an elegy, not an epithalamium," described the transformation of their relationship from erotic love to committed friendship: after 1941, Auden and Kallman "often lived together, but the relationship became more that of parent and child. They apparently were not again lovers."<sup>50</sup> In *The Winter's Tale's* final sheaf of conciliations, the segue from husband-wife to mother-child might portend a similar reorganization of intimacy in the ensemble of household relations rebuilt by incomplete forgiving and overflowing benediction. If such a scenario seems unduly modern, it is worth noting that King James I and Queen Anna of Denmark, before whom the play was performed several times, managed separate courts after 1607, thanks to incompatibilities around sexuality and child-rearing as well as religion and politics.<sup>51</sup> Shakespeare himself lived largely apart from his wife for much of his career.<sup>52</sup> My point is not to reduce the achievements of either Shakespeare or Auden to topical incitements, but to indicate rather that Auden's emphasis on the unconditional character of forgiveness can be rendered more elastic and thus, in a somewhat different sense, more forgiving (more lenient with respect to Hermione), by considering the limits of forgiveness in Auden's own writing. When we consider Auden's highly personal reading of the Shakespearean corpus as a complex mediation of life and art, or in Arendt's terms, of action and story, in the reality of their reserves and resistances, we can in turn stretch, darken, and deepen the scene of forgiving in *The Winter's Tale* and the kinds of life stories that scene might be imagined to yield.

#### IV. Conclusion: Arendt and the Crisis of the Humanities

I have tried to deploy the Arendt-Auden exchange around forgiving as a form of judgment in order to test my own judgment concerning what happens at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. Beyond their different approaches to forgiveness as a juridical, political, religious, dramatic, erotic, and poetic problem, the quality and creativity of the Auden-Arendt exchange may have something to teach us today about literary study as an activity engaging the full personhood and personality of its participants. Arendt dedicated her essay "Thinking and Moral Considerations" to Auden in 1971, three years before the death of the poet in Oxford.<sup>53</sup> She was *not* asking him to forgive her for refusing his offer

of marriage, but she *was* thanking him for eleven years of friendship and respect. In that essay, she spells out the stakes of judgment as “the most political of man’s mental abilities.” She concludes the piece with the following declaration: “Judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.”<sup>54</sup> “The wind of thought” *qua* thinking has no tangible outcomes; indeed its central effect is to undo and erode, to blow through received truths and become discontent with opinion, or simply to roll and roil without reaching conclusions. The whirling, whispering wind of thought nonetheless becomes “manifest in the world of appearances”—materializes into an identifiable shape or position, as “concepts, virtues, and ‘values’”—when the thinker makes a judgment on the state of affairs that confront her.<sup>55</sup> Such judgments reveal the speaker’s stakes in the public realm, prompt her movement into it, and affect the judgments of others.<sup>56</sup>

Arendt’s comments in her penultimate ode to Auden reflect her Kantian emphasis on the partnership between aesthetic and political judgment, and between judging and acting, which she had laid out in her 1960 essay “The Crisis of Culture: Its Social and its Political Significance.” There she distinguishes *culture* from *entertainment*, the first consisting of objects that build a world of some duration, the latter used up in processes of consumption that belong to the metabolic incorporations and dissolutions of life and labor (CC 208). Her claim that “a consumer’s society cannot possibly know how to take care of a world and the things which belong exclusively to the space of worldly appearances, because its central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches,” points to the environmental damage of consumerism in the age of planned obsolescence and lifestyle marketing (CC 211). By placing communicative acts in intertwined economic, technological, and biological networks with an eye to their existential significance, Arendt begins to sketch a media ecology in which different forms of representation take shape through their interaction with life processes and the world of things. Arendt’s effort to distinguish culture and entertainment is itself an act of judgment, a considered discrimination among different kinds of objects and compartments with an eye to the quality of their claims on us.

Whereas political judgment is the central topic of “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” aesthetic judgment is the keynote of “The Crisis in Culture.” Arendt shares Kant’s conviction that art objects are “the only

things without any function in the life process of society; strictly speaking, they are fabricated not for men, but for the world which is meant to outlast the life-span of mortals" (CC 209). Arendt makes room for relativism without relinquishing the responsibility to make judgments of taste. Thus she writes that judgment's "claims to validity can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations" (CC 221), and she understands that cathedrals institute a different kind of repository from museums while performing a similar public-convening, thing-conserving task (CC 209). When Auden praised Shakespeare for not taking art too seriously, he was discovering in Shakespeare an attitude consonant with his own seemingly apolitical dictum, "Poetry makes nothing happen." He was also participating along with Arendt in the Kantian tradition of identifying art with that which does not present itself immediately for use, a reservation and preservation that in turn helps shape a public realm organized in part to shield that space of pure appearing from instrumentalizing impulses.

Works of art, Arendt writes, "share with political 'products,' words and deeds, the quality that they are in need of some public space where they can appear and be seen; they can fulfill their own being, which is appearance, only in a world which is common to all" (CC 218). Arendt's valuation of objects and experiences that are not immediately useful but whose thoughtful consideration leads to reinvigorated and more inclusive public realms remains relevant to today's crisis in the humanities. A liberal education that offers extended encounters with works of art and literature cultivates "the discriminating, discerning, judging elements of an active love of beauty" (CC 219). If beauty seems too narrow or old-fashioned for the contemporary critic, other qualities arise from our encounters with works of art as possible standards of judgment. Is a work authentic, challenging, novel, or enduring? Funny in a manner that perplexes and engages? Sad in a fashion that whets the capacity to care? Startling in a mode that encourages acknowledgment? Or troubling in a way that urges action?<sup>57</sup> Whether or not we find the distinction between entertainment and culture compelling (*The Winter's Tale* is both), contemporary advocates of the humanities may do well to reread Arendt's considerations of judgment. Arendt's humanities constitute a course of inquiry that integrates the study of culture as the record of human action with attention to the biotechnical metabolisms of media ecologies. Arendt's humanities require shared spaces designed around both the nonutility and the public character of art. Above all, Arendt's humanities promote the exercise of judgment, which, like forgiving, is "an enlarged way of thinking" that "needs the presence of others" (CC 220–1).

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## NOTES

This essay reflects recent exchanges with Sanford Budick, Kevin Curran, James Kearney, Sean Keilen, and Björn Quiring.

1 W. H. Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's "The Tempest,"* ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), 53.

2 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), ix.

3 Adapted from *B'kol Echad: With One Voice*, ed. Jeffrey Shiovitz (NY: United Synagogue, 1998), 4. The blessing is based on the so-called "Priestly Blessing," given by God to Aaron, Numbers 6:22–27.

4 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 371–2, 436. Thoughtful commentaries on the Auden-Arendt exchange on forgiveness include Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W. H. Auden* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 1–16; Austin Sarat and Nasser Hussain, "Towards New Theoretical Perspectives on Forgiveness, Mercy, and Clemency: An Introduction," in *Forgiveness, Mercy, and Clemency*, ed. Sarat and Hussain (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 1–3; and the dissertation by Steven Prescott Ferguson, *Political Forgiveness: A Religious Interpretation of Arendt's Views* (USC and Proquest, 2006).

5 Arendt, "Remembering Wystan H. Auden, Who Died in the Night the Twenty-Eighth of September, 1973," in *Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 294–302.

6 Auden, "The Fallen City: Some Reflections on Shakespeare's *Henry IV*," *Encounter* 13, no. 5 (1959): 28.

7 "On the stage, however, it is impossible to show one person forgiving another, unless the wrongdoer ask for forgiveness, because silence and inaction is undramatic." For Auden, asking forgiveness (and verbally giving it) is a deficiency, whereas for Arendt speech is a condition of forgiveness. Auden, "Fallen City," 28.

8 See, for example, Michael D. Bristol's thoughtful account: "To describe [Hermione's embrace] as a reconciliation, as so many commentators have done, is simply a form of wishful thinking." *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996), 174.

9 For a secular reading of *The Winter's Tale*, see Richard C. McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013). On Arendt's secularism, see Paul A. Kottman, "Novus Ordo Saeclorum: Hannah Arendt on Revolutionary Spirit," in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 143–58, and Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2014), 115–46.

10 The idea of a recursive benediction is Budick's, whose work on benediction orients this essay. See "The Emergence of Oedipus's Blessing: Evoking Wolfgang Iser," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 7, no. 1 (2009): 63–85; and "Shakespeare's Secular Benediction: The Language of Tragic Community in *King Lear*," in *Religious Diversity and Early Modern English Texts: Catholic, Judaic, Feminist, and Secular Dimension*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Chanita Goodblatt (Detroit, MI: Wayne State Univ. Press, 2013), 330–51.

11 The volume *Forgiveness, Mercy, and Clemency*, ed. Sarat and Hussain, begins with an account of the Arendt-Auden exchange (2–3). See also Grace Hunt, "Forgiveness," on the limited and political character of forgiveness, in *HA: Journal of the Hannah Arendt Center* 2 (2012): 60–63; and Roger Berkowitz, "The Power of Non-Reconciliation: Arendt's Judgment of Adolf Eichmann," *HannahArendt.net* (2011) <http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/11/8>.

12 Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 218.

- 13 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 220.
- 14 Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 236–7 (hereafter cited as *HC*).
- 15 “All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom, which, by producing the web of human relationships, seems to entangle its producer to such an extent that he appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done” (*HC* 233–4).
- 16 For a searching discussion of the aporias of amnesty, see Adam Sitze, “Keeping the Peace,” in Sarat and Hussain, eds., 156–224.
- 17 Auden, “Thinking What We Are Doing,” review of *The Human Condition*, *Encounter* (June 1959): 72, 74. Arendt was introduced to Auden’s poetry by her friend, the poet Randall Jarrell.
- 18 On Auden’s Christianity, see Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2005).
- 19 Auden, “The Fallen City,” 28.
- 20 Auden, “Fallen City,” 29.
- 21 Arendt does not credit Judaism with a theology of forgiveness, but the Yom Kippur liturgy is concerned with the relationship among oaths, covenant, repentance, and forgiveness.
- 22 Arendt, letter to Wystan Auden, February 14, 1960. Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress American Memory Project, Document Number 004864.
- 23 In Sarat and Hussain’s helpful summary, “Arendt is suspicious of the theological heritage of both forgiveness and clemency. She believes that the tendency of Christian charity to forgive überhaupt destroys the element of judgment that forgiveness invites and, indeed, demands. Without such calibration and judgment, forgiveness would lack the mutuality and reciprocity needed for it to become a proper principle of public life” (3).
- 24 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness: Thinking in Action*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), 29.
- 25 All citations from *The Winter’s Tale* are from Stephen Orgel, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).
- 26 Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 295.
- 27 Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays by Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 220.
- 28 “Even if his responses prove disappointing she cannot, being living, avoid acknowledging him, even if such an acknowledgment takes the form of rebuff.” Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2012), 141.
- 29 On speech and forgiving: “the same *who*, revealed in action and speech, remains also the subject of forgiving” (*HC* 243). One could argue that Hermione’s physical actions are a form of speech, to which I would counter that her silence becomes remarkable for those on stage, leading Paulina to prompt her to turn from Leontes to Perdita in order to prime the well of speech,
- 30 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, ix.
- 31 Kevin Curran provides an Arendtian reading of Paulina’s exercise of a communal form of judgment in the trial scene: “The drive in Paulina’s lines is toward collectivity and the restoration of a *scene* of judgment. Paulina’s arbitrational practice carries a procedural authority absent from Leontes’s enraged decisionism. It also restores for a moment the co-dependent civility that Leontes’s egocentric judgment threatens.” Curran, “Judgment,” chapter from book in progress, “Shakespeare, Law, and Selfhood,” 36 (MS).

- 32 On the issue of forgiving on behalf of the dead, see for example Derrida, 43–44.
- 33 Curran, “Judgment,” 40.
- 34 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 45.
- 35 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 45.
- 36 On Hermione and Griselda, see the thoughtful reading by Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), 195–200.
- 37 These lines occur at the beginning of the play, where they describe the friendship of Polixenes and Leontes; they might also offer a map to remarriage at the end of the play.
- 38 Curran, “Judgment,” 43.
- 39 Budick, “Oedipus’s Blessing,” 83; Budick, “Shakespeare’s Secular Benediction,” 339. I first became attuned to the dramatic affordances of blessing in works by Björn Quiring, *Shakespeare’s Curse: The Aporias of Ritual Exclusion in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2014), and J. L. Simmons, “Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Familial Blessings: Historical Abruptions,” *MLQ* 74, no. 4 (2013): 441–63.
- 40 Budick, “Oedipus’s Blessing,” 64. On Kant and early modern literature, see Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010).
- 41 HC 103; Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 337. The full passage from *Essays in Understanding* reads as follows: “Virtue is happy to pay the price of limited power for the blessing of being together with other men; fear is the despair over the individual impotence of those who, for whatever reason, have refused to ‘act in concert’” (337).
- 42 Quiring, *Shakespeare’s Curse*, 2.
- 43 Budick, “Shakespeare’s Secular Benediction,” 339.
- 44 Budick, “Secular Benediction,” 347. A link with Judaism in the turn to Kant is not mentioned in Budick’s essays on benediction but is discussed in detail in his *Kant and Milton*, 227–34.
- 45 On Auden and blessing, see Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity*, 15–16, including Arendt’s perplexity, expressed in her eulogy for the poet, at his frequent recourse to the phrase, “Count your blessings.”
- 46 Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror*, 52–53.
- 47 For a rhetorical-performative approach to political theology as a set of resources and practices for engagement with “a postsectarian, postsecular” world, see Vincent M. Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2011). I share Lloyd’s commitment to developing “an antisupersessionist canon of political thought” (19).
- 48 On Auden, Kallman, and Shakespeare, see Kirsch, Introduction, *The Sea and the Mirror*, xxi–xxii, and Auden’s consecutive lectures on the Sonnets and the Henriad in *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 86–112. In *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, ed. Alan Jacobs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), Auden takes the part of Joseph (2).
- 49 Letter by Auden to Chester Kallman, Christmas Day, 1941, cited by Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity*, 24.
- 50 Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity*, 26.
- 51 *The Winter’s Tale* was performed at court in 1611, 1613, 1618, 1623, and 1634. Dennis Bartholomeusz, *The Winter’s Tale in Performance in England and America 1611–1976* (Cambridge: London, 1982), 12–27. On the separate court of Anna of Denmark and her patronage of theater and the arts, see J. Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
- 52 Countering the myth of Shakespeare as happily retiring to Stratford-upon-Avon with Ann, Katherine Duncan-Jones makes a strong case that his purchase of the gatehouse at Blackfriars in 1613 suggests his plan to live in London. *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from his Life* (Arden Shakespeare, 2001).

53 Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 436–7.

54 Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 446.

55 Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” *Responsibility and Moral Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 175.

56 Arendt citing Kant, “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance,” 220 (*Between Past and Future*, 194–222 (hereafter cited as CC)). (“The Crisis of Culture” first appeared in *Daedalus* in 1960 and was then republished in *Between Past and Future* in 1961.

57 On “minor” aesthetic judgments—those other than beautiful and sublime, see Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012).