The Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych [Fig. 1] by Hans Memling is a generous image.1 Its two panels (each measuring 52 by 41.5 cm) give the viewer seemingly direct access to an encounter between Maarten, a young Bruges patrician, and the Virgin and Child. The figures meet in a world that is so full of richly painted stuffs – glowing stained-glass windows; sturdy, wood-paneled walls; and brilliantly colored cloth – that it appears to exceed its fictive boundaries and merge with the space of the viewer. The picture’s surfeit of visual information extends from the deep background, with the tiny figures crossing a bridge over Bruges’s Minnewater, which can be seen through the window in the right panel, to the extreme foreground, where the Virgin’s cloak emerges from the left panel onto the diptych’s golden frame [Fig. 2].2 The red cloak, which is mirrored by a piece of identical red cloth propping up Maarten’s book in the portrait wing, provides a rubric for interpreting the image: Maarten’s Mary is the mater misericordiae, the mother of mercy. The mater misericordiae is the Virgin as the embodiment of compassion, celebrated by the words of the Salve Regina antiphon and depicted as the iconographic type called the Schutzmantelmadonna, who uses her cloak to shelter a group of diminutive people clustered

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Fig. 1. Hans Memling, *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* (1487). Bruges, Sint-Janshopitaal, Memling-museum. © Lukas – Art in Flanders VZW