"Service" in King Lear
Author(s): Jonas A. Barish and Marshall Waingrow
Source: Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 1958), pp. 347-355
Published by: Folger Shakespeare Library in association with George Washington University
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867337
Accessed: 15/03/2014 15:25

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
"Service" in *King Lear*

JONAS A. BARISH AND MARSHALL WAINGROW

To expostulate what majesty should be, what duty is, and other questions of this order need not, in the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, be a waste of time. Indeed, when a play, such as *King Lear*, dramatically poses such questions, what duty is for the critic is clear.

Criticism of *Lear* has all along been mindful of two of the three basic human relationships explored in the play, relationships enunciated very early in a speech of Kent's:

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,

(1. i. 141-143)

And recent criticism has been especially alert to the ways in which Lear's status as king and as father is insinuated into the various planes of action. Yet, while it is not easy to observe the workings of any one of these relationships apart from the others (Lear, after all, is king, father, master, servant; Gloucester, subject, father, "ward", master, servant; Cordelia, subject, queen, child, mistress, servant; etc.), the third relationship, that of master and servant, has never to our knowledge been isolated for critical examination: surely not because the

1 Since our intention in this article is not polemical, and since the literature on *Lear* is so bulky that documentation can easily become the tail that wags the dog, we have decided not to enter detailed acknowledgments to other critics. Our aim has been to discuss a significant theme not heretofore isolated for analysis. In doing so we hope we have made some new points, but frequently we presuppose familiar interpretations of the play as a whole or in part by previous writers. Such indebtedness will be apparent. We are, of course, under obligation to the work of A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, and R. B. Heilman. Among more recent studies, we have found helpful Empson's essay, "Fool in *Lear*" (in *The Structure of Complex Words*), John F. Danby's *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: a Study of King Lear*, D. H. Traversi's series of essays in *Scrutiny* (XIX, 43ff., 126ff., 206ff.), and Kenneth Muir's edition of the play in *The New Arden Shakespeare*. We are aware that our "significant theme" is by no means confined to *King Lear*. Lear merely seems to dramatize it more fully and complexly than usual, and so to offer the best occasion for extended comment. A mere enumeration, however, of names like Buckingham, Hubert, Adam, Iago and Cassio, Menas and Enocharbus, the Steward in *Timon of Athens*, Pisanio, Camillo and Paulina, Gonzalo, and Wolsey, and a reminder of how often such characters are forced into generalizing statements concerning their relations with their respective masters, will perhaps in itself suffice to indicate the persistence of Shakespeare's preoccupation with the subject. In a few suggestive pages (pp. 277-282) in *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952), Alfred Harbage has sketched the main outlines of the master-servant relationship in Shakespeare and in the Elizabethan popular theatre generally.

We quote throughout from George Lyman Kittredge, ed. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Boston, 1936), pp. 1197-1239.
theme or motif has gone unnoticed; perhaps, on the contrary, because of our Polonian overconfidence before the obvious.

But the theme of service in Lear is obvious, we feel, only in its presence, not in its meaning. Its presence is felt very strongly not only through the steady succession of incidents involving masters and servants, but even more pervasively through verbal reiteration: service, servile, serviceable, servant, servingman, serve, slave, master, command, obey, lead, follow, duty, bond, obligation, and the like. Its meaning, on the other hand, as an attempt to formulate it has shown us, involves a number of intersecting paradoxes which effectively demolish a complacent reading ("Service is service"). But we will be brief.

Service, for our purposes, may be thought of as the formalization of relationships between individuals of different social or political rank. So much is implicit in the doctrine of hierarchy. An individual obeys or ministers to his superior in the social scale, and that superior ministers to his superior. But an essential thing about this relationship in Lear is its feudal character: ideal service works two ways; it implies rights as well as duties, on each side. The reciprocity suggested by the term "bond", where privileges are granted at the same time that duties are imposed, is the condition that justifies service in principle; in practice, it is precisely the denial of reciprocity that is the first of Lear's tragic violations. By refusing to honor the reciprocal force of the bond tying him to his inferiors, Lear cuts the bond, "cracks" it, and so lets loose the forces of disorder, division, and disservice that are to overwhelm the kingdom.

Yet, and this is the reward of tragedy, a profound vision of life arises from the debris of the disaster. We are no longer able to view society as a rigid, absolute, or even wholly "real" structure. We, like Lear and Cordelia at the end of the play, have become "God's spies", and from this supreme vantage point recognize the hierarchical order for what it is: a system that expresses both more and less than the actualities of life. As servants of God, we discover the true and whole meaning of service: that by promoting concord between individuals of different rank, it ends by minimizing distinctions of rank. Witness Kent: the moral stature of the vassal raises him to a special plane of equality with his social superior. Returning to the stage to bid farewell to Lear, Kent is introduced to his master as "noble Kent, your friend" (V. iii. 268). Through his very immersion in service (Edgar pays tribute to him as one "who in disguise / Followed his enemy king and did him service / Improper for a slave" V. iii. 219-221), he has transcended his status in the act of upholding it. On the other side, false service affects the structure of society in the opposite way: instead of progressing towards a uniquely human kind of solidarity, above the prevailing relationships of rank, it plunges society downwards into a bestial chaos where social distinctions are supplanted by the rule of tooth and claw. In either case, Shakespeare's treatment of this theme expresses more forcibly than either the king-subject or father-child configurations both the meaning and the meaninglessness of rank and degree in human life. We ought perhaps to remind ourselves, before wielding the doctrine of hierarchical order as a tool of literary criticism, of its ambiguous structure: the "chain of being" is both mechanical and vital, and its virtue depends not upon a mechanical adherence (the appropriation of the second term by the first) but upon a creative realization of its design (the appropriation of the first term by the second).
As we have already suggested, the quintessence of the good servant and the touchstone for service throughout the play is Kent. His code can be reduced almost to two commandments: absolute loyalty to his master and absolute loyalty to the truth. His devotion to Lear far exceeds in emotional intensity any of the relationships where blood kinship plays no part, and most of those where it does. Nevertheless, this devotion presupposes an even more fundamental devotion to the truth, and it therefore serves only the truth in Lear—in "Royal Lear"—and not the caprices of vanity or senility. Kent's good service therefore starts (in the play) with an act of disobedience, the only alternative being an act of servility—a dilemma created by the King's failure to recognize the counterpart of his subject's obligation to him. Kent is thus forced to give up the conventionally conceived role of servant for that of master—and teacher. This desperate stratagem failing, then to "willful men / The injuries that they themselves procure / Must be their schoolmasters" (II. iv. 305-307). With the banishment of Kent, the ideal of service is overthrown, and the spirit of time-serving usurps the kingdom.

The action of Kent is of course precipitated by the action of Cordelia, and the reaction of Lear, and it is apparent from the start that the relationship of king and vassal (or master and servant) and that of father and child are co-extensive. The father, a patriarchal figure, commands the same obedience from his children that he does from his servants. In return he offers them his protection and his wisdom. The word "bred" provides a verbal link between the kinds of responsibility assumed alike by father for children and master for servants. Cornwall's servant has been "bred" by Cornwall, as has Cordelia by Lear and Edmund by Gloucester. Lear's daughters, then, as children, as servants, and as subjects fall under a triple obligation. Cordelia bases her behavior in the opening scene squarely on this fact. "I love your Majesty / According to my bond. . . . You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me; I / Return those duties back as are right fit" (I. i. 94-95, 98-99). The phrase in (our) italics expresses in condensed form the mutuality of the bond as Cordelia understands it. Lear, who finds such talk of duty legalistic and heartless, as he finds Kent's kind of loyalty mutinous, fails to perceive that the reciprocal nature of the bond supplies the guarantee that it is not merely mechanical, but dynamic and vital. It proves in fact sufficiently vital to withstand Lear's onslaught upon it: both Kent and Cordelia continue to regard it as binding even after Lear has cut it.

Oswald is Kent turned inside out, the bad servant anonymized, and their altercation in the courtyard of Gloucester's castle presents in almost schematic form the confrontation of true service with false. The true servitor arrives meanly clothed, his coarse garments the emblem of his humility and of his "unpublish'd virtue". The false servant, on the other hand, appears fastidiously arrayed in the livery of his mistress' house, in finery signifying not only his own narcissism and that of his mistress Goneril, but the total immolation of his will in hers, his failure to exist at all except as her creature. She has made him, and by her orders, the tailor, and nature, "disclaims" him. If Goneril is herself "Vanity the puppet", Oswald is the puppet's puppet.

All this is made explicit by Kent in a series of tirades which remind us that he has joined the chorus of madmen who alone may speak truth under the present regime. Oswald is a "whoreson, glass-gazing, superserviceable, finical
SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY

rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that [would] be a bawd in way of good service; and [is] nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch" (II. ii. 18-23). Again:

Such smiling rogues as these,
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain
Which are too intrinse t'unloose; smooth every passion
That in the natures of their lords rebel,
Bring oil to fire, snow to their colder moods;
Renenge, affirm, and turn their halcyon beaks
With every gale and vary of their masters,
Knowing naught (like dogs) but following.

(II. ii. 79-86)

To Edgar, as to Kent, Oswald is “a serviceable villain, / As duteous to the vices of [his] mistress / As badness would desire” (IV. vi. 257-259). Though, by his excess of obedience, he seems to be preserving order, his complaisance stirs up animal appetites which end by cutting “the holy cords atwain / Which are too intrinse t'unloose.” Consequently he ultimately promotes division and disunity rather than solidarity.

The conscious exponent of the service that leads to chaos is Edmund, whose malignance surpasses Oswald’s by virtue of its greater self-awareness. Of all the characters Edmund is the one with the word “service” most often on his tongue. He offers his services on various occasions to Kent, Edgar, Gloucester, and Cornwall, as well as—in a more special sense—to Goneril and Regan. If, speaking to Kent in the opening scene of the play, he claims for himself the dual role of servant and pupil (“My services to your lordship. . . Sir, I shall study deserving”), his first soliloquy notifies us that such professions are lip-service only. Even his vow of allegiance to his “goddess” Nature reduces itself to a tautology. Although the phrase “to thy law / My services are bound” (I. ii. 1-2) appears to recognize both the idea of obligation and the reciprocal character of the bond, in fact it is a negation of both, since what Edmund means by “Nature” and her “law” proves to be nothing but the anarchic principle of his own will and appetite, the absence of obligation to any one or any thing other than himself, the complete denial of reciprocity.

To the world Edmund offers the tribute of hypocrisy paid by vice to virtue. Like Goneril and Regan, he assumes to himself in public all of the orthodox right feelings about the bond that he has spurned in private, and projects onto Edgar and Gloucester in turn his own cynical, disruptive sentiments. He takes Kent for his model in the forms of service. As Kent had defended Lear in the past (“My life I never held but as a pawn / To wage against thine enemies” I. i. 157-158), so Edmund will “defend” Edgar (“I dare pawn down my life for him that he hath writ this to feel my affection to your honour” I. ii. 92-94).

The doctrine of wardship, ascribed with malicious intent by Edmund to Edgar, “that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declining, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue” (I. ii. 77-79), provides a good example of the ambiguous way in which distinctions between true and false service operate in the play. Gloucester’s readiness in equating this doctrine with the palpably unwholesome sentiments of the forged letter (“I begin to find
an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny” I.ii.52-53) may perhaps appear to justify the application of the doctrine in this instance. In any case, the doctrine of wardship, while it may serve as a convenient mask for remissness (Lear), or rebellion (apparently Edgar), or tyranny (Regan), may also express a genuine ideal of service (Edgar and Cordelia).

If in Edmund we see the vicious servant posing as the genuine and making the world accept the imposture, in Edgar we see the true servant victimized, returning to enact a kind of purgatorial masquerade as the false servant. Edgar represents himself as a former courtier, proud, vain, and lascivious, who served the lust of his mistress’ heart and the evil impulses in himself. But whereas in the “real” world of the play, false servants thrive, Edgar exhibits Poor Tom as outcast for his falseness. Poor Tom has become an archetype of degraded humanity, the victim of every humiliation inflicted on loyal followers—whipped, like the Fool, placed in the stocks, like Kent, imprisoned, like Cordelia, and, of course, banished. Here, because it occurs only in Edgar’s fantasy, justice triumphs; the “undivulged crimes” of darkness are exposed and punished. Instead of “corruption in the place” and truth in exile, there is a meaningful relationship between crime and punishment. The madman, in a world itself gone mad, becomes a microcosm of the world gone sane, where malignant service, instead of being rewarded, is turned out of doors and pursued by vermin, dogs, and fiends.

But Edgar is Edgar as well as Poor Tom, and in returning to serve where he stands condemned, he demonstrates, like Cordelia and Kent, that the holy cords are “too intrinsize t’unloose”. The doctrine of wardship sophistically enunciated by Edmund and interpreted as treachery by Gloucester vindicates itself triumphantly as true service in Edgar’s ministrations to his father. Gloucester, before he can regain the mastery he has wantonly abdicated, must pass through a period of apprenticeship to his good servant.

Similarly, the Fool, by virtue of the license accorded him, becomes tutor to Lear, delivering his lessons not bluntly, as Kent does, nor ralingly, but wrapped up in enigmatic riddles, jingles, and proverbs, which nevertheless are plain enough to arouse the threat of the whip on several occasions. The Fool’s preoccupation with the nature of service is almost obsessive, since it involves on the one hand a conviction that to serve a master in disgrace is folly, and on the other an even more intense conviction that to leave him in the same circumstance is knavery. He makes his first appearance jeering at Kent “for taking one’s part that’s out of favour”, and predicts declining fortunes for those who cannot “smile as the wind sits” (I. iv.111-113). He repeatedly counsels prudent, self-interested service, and ignores his own counsel in order to obey a more obscure impulse of loyalty grounded in feeling. There is never the slightest doubt but that his loyalty will override his commonsense, but there is the need to demonstrate to Lear what the latter does not yet understand—that true service has little to do with prudence or calculation, and that if it did, he, Lear, would find no followers at all in this bleak time. The Fool’s advice to the ensticked Kent is a perfect paradigm of self-seeking servility, but it concludes with the reflection that such advice should be followed by none but knaves, since a fool gives it. This in turn is succeeded by the jingle in which the prudential knave becomes the fool:
And the dialogue concludes with a nice equation of the Fool and Kent, on the side of true service:

**Kent.** Where learn'd you this, fool?
**Fool.** Not i' th' stocks, fool. (87-88)

The service of Gloucester is service by habit, by convenience, and by the book, and he suffers the fate of those who so serve. In his abhorrence of the prospect of becoming ward to his good son, he permits himself to be "rul'd and led" by his bad son. Entering the service of Cornwall, he continues to be his "good" vassal until a series of progressively more painful revelations brings him to understand that allegiance to Cornwall is incompatible with loyalty to Lear, and he is finally driven to an act of rebellion which (like Kent's) is at the same time an act of mastery and an act of true service.

The mutilation which ensues, like the banishment of Kent and Edgar, both a punishment and a privilege, the emblem of Gloucester's enlightenment. But the enlightenment produces its own excesses. The knowledge that he has been treacherously served in the past, the knowledge that true service brings down cruel reprisals on itself, seem to produce a revulsion against all service. Almost his first act, after he has been thrust out onto the heath, blinded and bleeding, is to refuse the aid of an old family retainer. "Good friend, be gone. / Thy comforts can do me no good at all; / Thee they may hurt" (IV.i.15-17). Rather than expose a loyal follower to tyranny, rather than invite perfidious service again, Gloucester will admit as servant only the madman, "the fool no knave", incapable of perfidy and immune from reprisals. His disillusionment with service expresses itself further as a weariness with all exercise of authority. "Do as I bid thee", he says to the retainer, "or rather do thy pleasure. / Above the rest, be gone" (IV.i.47-48). The madman, as he is now the only fitting person to render service, is also the only fitting recipient of it: Gloucester dispatches the old man to collect rags for Edgar. With the readmission of Edgar to his service, and the (unknowing) placing of himself under his son's tutelage, Gloucester begins the final stages of his reeducation.

But it is the education of Lear that is the central fact about which everything else in the play turns, and through which the values of the drama acquire most of their meaning and expressiveness. Through the consequences of his initial act of folly, Lear gains a steadily deepening insight into the truth, and specifically, for the sake of the present discussion, into the nature of true service, which brings him finally to a condition of purified peace beyond anything he might have gained as reigning monarch.

Even before he clashes with Cordelia and Kent in the first scene, Lear shows
an ominous inability or unwillingness to grasp some elementary principles. Notably, he fails to perceive that political unity is both an ideal in itself and a curb on disunity. By proposing to partition his kingdom, he invites division on all sides; the symbolic parting of the coronet ushers in an epoch marked by splitting, cracking, and parting of every sort. Forgetting that to rule properly is to foster solidarity, Lear proves himself a bad king even before he proves himself a bad father and master. And this first failure may be regarded as the failure of a servant—the chief servant of the state. One reason why masters and servants are forever switching roles in this play is that character is conceived as a combination of both roles. Failure to serve is closely linked with failure to rule.

For a time after the abdication, Lear persists in his crude notions of kingship, fatherhood, and service. He welcomes the disguised Kent in a revealing way: "Follow me; thou shalt serve me. If I like thee no worse after dinner, I will not part from thee yet" (I.iv.43-45). Despite the intended levity, the remark grimly recalls the whimsicality so tragically paraded in the first scene. Equally revealing is his reaction to the scuffle between Kent and Oswald a moment later. "I thank thee, fellow. Thou serv'st me, and I'll love thee" (97-98). This invitation to service does not wholly deny the reciprocal element in the relationship, but it makes the reciprocity contingent; it turns it into a legal transaction, a quid pro quo (the other side of "Nothing will come of nothing"). The bond becomes a document negotiable by a bond salesman, instead of a vital covenant expressive of mutual love and responsibility.

That the specific issue over which Lear becomes embroiled with his elder daughters should be his allowance of retainers is, needless to say, very much to the point in this discussion. Lear's impassioned defense of his knights represents his first attempt to grapple seriously with the meaning of service. If the relationship were simply a matter of ducats dispensed for chores performed, their dismissal would not matter. Others, as Goneril and Regan argue, could perform the same functions. But it is their personal loyalty to him that counts, their love; and it is this that Lear defends, and this that Goneril attacks. The very presence of honest and incorruptible service is a rebuke to her, whether it comes from the knights or from the keener-sighted and more articulate (and hence more hated) Fool.

Lear's clearing vision of the truth seems fated to be achieved only through the ordeal of retribution, as one by one the defects of his understanding reappear like perverted images in a nightmare. The doctrine of tutelage, which has already torn Gloucester's family apart, and to which Lear had committed himself by his abdication, receives another sinister twist by Regan: "You should be rul'd, and led / By some discretion that discerns your state / Better than you yourself" (II.iv.150-152). The crass bidding in demonstrations of love that Lear extorted from his daughters as the price of realms now reverses itself: Goneril and Regan compete in beating down the price of their father's love: one hundred knights, fifty knights, twenty-five knights. As the last stage in a warped dialectic which offers all the "right" reasons as a cloak for power, Regan appeals to the need for solidarity: "How in one house / Should many people, under two commands, / Hold amity? "Tis hard; almost impossible" (243-245). A question which Lear failed to ask when he divided his kingdom.
Belatedly, it is Lear himself who provides the corrective to the perverted philosophy of his daughters in the speech beginning "O, reason not the need!" (267ff.), in which he powerfully articulates the distinction between material and true need. But to Goneril and Regan the kind of service that their father professes to need is, like old age itself, "unnecessary".

Perhaps the most complex image of retribution in the play is the storm which affronts Lear on the heath. As he has tried to make his daughters obey him and has only succeeded in becoming their "obedient father", so he gives orders to the elements only to acknowledge shortly that he is their slave, not their master. Absolving them of ingratitude, he goes on to accuse them of servility, for having joined with villainous daughters to humble him. He now thinks of himself as occupying the lowest rung on the ladder of service: slave to the elements, which in turn are only "servile ministers" to his daughters. Kent and Gloucester concur in describing the storm as a "tyranny". Nature itself assumes the role which Lear, in the first scene of the play, "created".

As slave to the elements, Lear finds himself a member of the confraternity of degraded servants: Kent, Edgar, the Fool, and, finally, Gloucester. Lear's vision of universal suffering evoked by the tempest expresses his new perception of the kind of bond that underlies all human relationships, that of a common humanity. While faction rages between France and England and discord grows between the dukes of Albany and Cornwall, Lear and his ragged band of supporters on the heath display an impressive solidarity. Lear insists on considering the comfort of Kent and the Fool before his own, and refuses to be parted from his new-found philosopher-friend, Poor Tom. "Come, let's in all", he urges, when Gloucester has led them to the hovel. Gloucester's repeated use of the word "friend" and Edgar's sententious couplets emphasize further the shared nature of the experience: none must stay behind (III. iv, vi). Adversity, having winnowed the true followers from the false, now draws the true followers together in a communion so close that all become "mates" and "fellows" regardless of social degree. Through their devotion to him, Lear's followers fit themselves to be termed his friends. Through his compassion for them, Lear earns the right to be called theirs.

It is Cordelia, however, from whom Lear is to learn his final lessons. "I know you do not love me", he tells her, "for your sisters / Have, as I do remember, done me wrong. / You have some cause, they have not" (IV. vii. 73-75), still clinging to his view of the bond as a *quid pro quo*. Cordelia, who might well reply "O, reason not the cause!" deliberately avoids confronting argument with argument, and simply erases the premise: "No cause, no cause."

Embodying as she does the authentic ideal of self-mastery ("It seem'd she was a queen / Over her passion, who, most rebel-like, / Sought to be king o'er her" IV. iii. 15-17), Cordelia is properly the one to receive Lear's final tribute. His kneeling to her completes the progress of his humility, the casting off of authority, and the joyful relinquishment of it to one who is fitted to command. When, earlier, he had knelt before Regan, it was a gesture of savage irony, intended to exhibit its own unseemliness. But his suffering has taught him that humility does not mean humiliation. To kneel may be a way of offering allegiance to a moral superior. The prison paradise imagined by Lear for himself and Cordelia when they are captured translates the kneeling incident into a
"SERVICE" IN KING LEAR

355

recurrent fantasy: "When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness" (V. iii. 10-11). Lear's sense of reciprocity is finally intense. The gesture of humility on the part of one must be completed by a complementary gesture from the other. Mutual service is to become a kind of competition in self-effacement. At the same time it spells the repudiation of all worldly service. Lear and Cordelia, withdrawn from the affairs of men, will enlist in the service of God (or the gods), spying out the mystery of things, reserving only the right to laugh at the vicissitudes of in and out among worldly servants.

The play moves to its end amid images of splitting, cracking, and bursting. Dissensions in families and discord between kingdoms terminate finally in the rupturing of hearts. The hearts of Gloucester, Kent, and Lear crack one by one at the moment of renewed unity: Gloucester dies in the instant of reunion with his son; Lear dies to rejoin Cordelia; Kent to rejoin Lear. As for the evil characters, they achieve a kind of unity appropriate to them: Edmund, Goneril, and Regan "All three / Now marry in an instant" (V. iii. 228-229)—in a bigamous death. Kent's tragic fate is to fail to see his service consummated by an earthly reunion with Lear; in the final meeting, the King, numbed by the death of his daughter, scarcely recognizes his vassal and friend. Yet the continuing separation is in keeping with the tragic vision of earthly service as realizable only, or best, in a state of alienation. "To be acknowledg'd, madam, is o'erpaid", Kent had protested to Cordelia (IV. vii. 4), instinctively recoiling from even the smell of quid pro quoism.

The deaths of Lear and Gloucester and their bad children leave the state purified of its stain of misservice. Those who remain dedicate themselves to the restoration of unity. "Our present business / Is general woe". "Friends of my soul, you twain / Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain", says Albany to Edgar and Kent (V. iii. 318-320). The new monarchs, characterized as "friends", are enjoined to serve the state by sustaining it. But "twain" augurs ill for future solidarity (cf. IV. vi. 209-211), and Kent's withdrawal leaves the way free for Edgar to assume sole command. Edgar reiterates the note of service sounded by Albany: "The weight of this sad time we must obey" (V. iii. 323). And with the ascent to kingship of the true servant, who has shared the purgatory of Lear and Gloucester, expiated his own faults of service (real and imagined) in his masquerade as Poor Tom, and defeated the cardinal emblem of false service in knightly combat, the kingdom enters on its new life.

University of California, Berkeley
Yale University

This content downloaded from 137.140.1.131 on Sat, 15 Mar 2014 15:25:36 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions