

Judith Weil. *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp ix, 210.

In *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays*, Judith Weil discusses service in twelve Shakespearean plays in light of other types of early modern dependency, such as those of children upon parents, wives upon husbands, and friends upon one another. Viewing Shakespeare's characters 'as moving intersections of relationships' (1), she analyzes characters not ordinarily thought of as subject to the demands of service with regard to their interactions with servant-characters. Weil begins by establishing the importance and pervasiveness of the idea of service in the early modern period. She also reviews the social history of service, demonstrating that service could be an unstable, contradictory institution that often contributed to what she calls 'crises of obligation' (10) in the plays. All of this serves to demonstrate what a complex concept service was and how useful Shakespeare and other playwrights found it as a dramatic device.

Weil's second chapter discusses the connections between children and service, concentrating on Hamlet and Coriolanus, both of whom Weil sees as damaged as they mature by the pressures their societies channel through service. Ashamed of his subordinate position, particularly as a son compelled to act as avenging agent for his murdered father, Hamlet often speaks and behaves like a cheeky young attendant; his sense of constraint leads to his attacks on other dependent characters, such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Polonius, and Ophelia. In contrast, Weil attributes Coriolanus's contempt for his social inferiors and fear of subjection to his military education. Unlike many critics, Weil argues that Coriolanus is not destroyed by his mother, but rather that Volumnia restores her son's humanity by recalling him to his family roles. Immediately thereafter, Coriolanus returns to his enslaver, Aufidius, who destroys him. However, Weil also finds some positive aspects of service for the young: in *King John*, she sees the Bastard as making his way in the world by imitating the courtesy characteristic of upper servants, although Prince Arthur's attempts to find protection from a servant and safety in disguising himself as a servant fail to save his life. In *Cymbeline*, a play Weil describes as presenting an idealization of service, Imogen is a daughter who seeks and finds a master; her disguise as a servant preserves her to become part of the play's happy ending.

In Chapter Three, Weil discusses the distinctions early modern conduct books made between wives and servants. She nevertheless argues that the

heroines of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are depicted as becoming servants of their husbands. Kate learns to serve, comes to appreciate service, and joins a community of service in Petruchio's household; Helena, who is compared to Patient Grissil, combines the roles of wife and servant, but is not accepted by Bertram as his spouse until she discards the servility that Bertram despises because he fears it for himself. In her discussion of *Othello*, Weil shows how Iago, acting as a servant, destroys Othello and Desdemona's marriage, while Emilia, also observing the conventions of service, restores Othello's faith in his wife (too late, to be sure). Iago enslaves Othello, while Emilia's actions late in the play free Othello to return to his earlier, heroic self. Weil argues that Leontes becomes jealous of Hermione because she serves him so well, but his servants Camillo and Paulina save their king from himself by virtuously disobeying him.

Chapter Four examines some of the varied attitudes about and definitions of friendship in the early modern era, before discussing the convergence of service and friendship in *2 Henry IV* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Weil maintains that the very happiness and sense of security that Falstaff receives from his closeness to the Prince intensify his shock when Hal rejects him, and thus lead to his death. Having discussed Plutarch's treatment of flattery and its effect on Antony, Weil argues that such characters as Enobarbus and Charmian engage in a kind of flattery that allows these servants to protect themselves while offering counsel to their employers; however, the examples chosen do not seem designed to flatter, but rather to amuse, tease, or even provoke, as well as advise, the protagonists. What Weil describes as 'friendly flattery' (91) often seems neither flattering nor particularly friendly. Although Weil is correct in noting that various characters advise Antony, whether Shakespeare's original audience necessarily perceived this advice as flattery seems open to question. Weil uses the term 'hidden flattery' to describe what Enobarbus and Cleopatra say to Antony after Actium; the apparently oxymoronic phrase is accurate in the sense that if what these characters say is flattery, it is indeed very well hidden.

In Chapter Five, Weil examines *King Lear* in terms of the dependencies discussed in earlier chapters. Lear relies on the love of his dependents, making few distinctions among the services owed by children, nobility, friends, and servants. Weil finds Cordelia and Kent 'touched by servility' (110) in their self-subordination to Lear despite their early defiance of his wishes. Some of Weil's observations about the play appear contradictory, as when she argues that 'some guarantee of safety is what Lear may have been hoping to hear in

his daughter's [sic] pledges of loving allegiance' immediately before asserting that 'Lear is too innocent about danger' (114). Weil views *Lear* as blending service and maternity, although she sees the maternity as inhering in both men and daughters. She observes that much of the play's pregnancy imagery is associated with men; women—some of them daughters or servants—are linked with imagery of illegitimacy and rejection. She describes Edgar's disguise as the demonically possessed former 'parasite' Poor Tom as a commentary on the combination of friendship and service that she calls 'assured friendship' and on the negative aspects of the dependencies generated by service.

In Weil's reading of the Scottish Play, in her final chapter, Macbeth collaborates with the witches, Banquo's ghost, and evil spirits to enslave Scotland. Through enslaving others, however, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth themselves become enslaved. Similarly, the witches and Hecate are depicted as both controlling and controlled, thus obscuring and corrupting agency with regard both to themselves and to Macbeth. Weil's attempt to associate Lady Macbeth with servants, however, is less convincing than her assertions that Macbeth makes war on dependents, including servants, and that by the end of the play he has become 'a human thing' (145), symbolized by his final appearance as a head impaled upon a pike or other tool.

The book ends with a two-page 'Epilogue' that asks whether there is anything to be gained by taking Macbeth's Porter, who differs from most of Shakespeare's servant-characters in his isolation, 'seriously as a servant' (146). Weil's answer is that the Porter is an actor and that many servants in this period were actors, just as actors were servants. This is a useful insight, but a more developed conclusion, perhaps comparing and contrasting the different types of dependencies discussed in the book, would have been welcome. Nevertheless, in demonstrating and exploring the connections among servants and other subordinate groups in Shakespeare's plays, Weil has performed a valuable service (no pun intended).

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