

Love and Service in *Twelfth Night* and the Sonnets

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I

LOVE HAS ALL BUT VANISHED FROM CURRENT CRITICAL DISCOURSE. Since the theoretical transformation of Shakespeare studies some twenty years ago, scholars have been reluctant to engage with either the word or the concept in Shakespeare's work. A pair of terms that now regularly do service in its place—*power* and *desire*—have replaced *love*. The word is impossibly general and vague, while *power* and *desire*, properly theorized, have promised to strip *love* of its murkiness and sentimentality. They have enabled us to shift our attention from a relatively naïve and common-sense obsession with what characters feel to the structural conditions that allow such feelings to be manipulated in relations of power and subjection. *Desire* and *power* thus assure entry into the history and politics of sexual relations that *love* positively debars. Their critical keenness permits them to reveal the structural reality underlying talk of love.

But we need to take care when we reduce one concept to another. Such a transformation, whereby one argues that “love is not love”—being instead desire, formations of power, ideological obfuscation of real relations, and so on—runs the risk of simplifying or distorting the concept as it does its work in the complex interactions of Shakespeare's poetry and plays. Such reductions may be analytically illuminating, but when they begin to supplant the original concept, they generally lose more than they gain. It is curious that now, within a critical milieu so committed to an historical understanding of texts, we have replaced words that Shakespeare uses frequently with ones he seldom uses and whose theoretical inflections he would have found strange. Rather than offering a refreshed, overarching concept of love in Shakespeare or the early modern period, or even attempting to recover a unifying notion peculiar to Shakespeare's time, I wish to look more carefully at how the word *love* is used in *Twelfth Night* and in Sonnets 26, 57, 58, and 120. Love is what Ludwig Wittgenstein called a “family-resemblance” concept: that is to say, it has no single, core meaning in all of its separate uses.¹ Instead it produces a network of meanings, each of which may in turn be

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959), 16ff.

related to other words—other strands in the network—cognate with it in ways that depend on context.

Recent critics have tended to prefer *desire* or *Eros* over *love* not only because of the latter word's association with sentiment but also because an earlier generation of Shakespeare scholars identified it with a state in which characters rise above the trammeling conditions of social, political, and economic relations.² But these are insufficient reasons to abandon or shun the word, or to substitute for its range of meanings other concepts related but not identical to it. I aim to explore ways in which love is indeed connected to social concerns—to the inequalities of political or economic power—and to show that it offers no transcendent escape from them, at least in Shakespeare's texts. But I also want to show, first, that love is concerned not just with the absences and inequities of desire but also with the pleasures of intimacy and the demands of reciprocity;³ and, second, that the intimacy and reciprocity inherent in love may be borrowed from relationships, such as those between master and servant, that appear at first sight to be wholly unerotic.

This essay focuses on such uses and contexts in the five works listed above. Instead of talking exclusively about desire and power in these texts, I shall examine the related-but-distinct uses of love and service. It is surprising that the critical interest in service has come so recently, considering how central and pervasive the experience of service is to the early modern period and its literature. There has been little focus, however, on service in relation to love. Whereas love and service, in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, are related to power and desire, they cannot be reduced to them. If we are now persuaded that erotic relationships are often predicated on inequalities of power, then it seems obvious that relationships between masters and servants should exemplify a clash between power and desire. And yet attention to such relationships reveals that both love and service encompass ideals and obligations of reciprocity alien to our current, historically lopsided preoccupation with what love is *not*.

² Catherine Belsey promises a discussion of love in her title but replaces that word with "desire" in the text of her essay "Love in Venice" in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, Deborah B. Parker and Ivo Kamps, eds. (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 196–213; Bruce R. Smith uses "erôs" in his "Premodern Sexualities," *PMLA* 115.3 (2000): 318–29; and Dymphna C. Callaghan tackles the notion of romantic love head-on but as a mode of ideological misrecognition in "The Ideology of Romantic Love: The Case of *Romeo and Juliet*" in *Romeo and Juliet: New Casebooks*, R. S. White, ed. (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 85–115. An exception to this trend, and perhaps a sign of a revival of the concept of love, is Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000). See also John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and his Comedies*, 2d ed. (London: Methuen, 1957), which treats love as a central theme of the romantic comedies; and Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Methuen, 1974).

³ I suggest this argument in embryonic form in "Shakespeare's Talking Bodies," *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 13 (2000): 277–302.

It is difficult for modern readers to register precisely the Sonnets' use of linguistic play with love and service, especially if the original conditions of utterance were indeed those of master and servant—that is to say, if the language of service in Sonnets 57 and 58, for example, is not a merely literary or metaphorical conceit but derives its force from real social relations, even as it also seeks to transform them. Historians estimate that “servants . . . constituted around 60 per cent of the population aged fifteen to twenty-four” in early modern England.⁴ Most of the population would therefore have spent some portion of their lives in service, and for many that condition would have been permanent. Furthermore, being a servant transcended class status.⁵ “People as socially disparate as agricultural laborers and children of the aristocracy were servants.” Because servants were regarded as part of the family, an extraordinarily complex set of relations existed between authority and service in the late-medieval and early modern household; and Keith Wrightson reminds us that household relationships were “shot through with ambiguities and inconsistencies, if not outright contradictions. Familial relationships were hierarchical but also reciprocal. Authority was besieged with obligations of love and care.”⁶ Michael Neill has demonstrated that service was viewed as a divinely ordained bond that constituted the social order itself, while Mark Thornton Burnett and David Evett offer diverging historical and theoretical frameworks for a consideration of service as a major component of early modern English theater.⁷

⁴ Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 3. See also Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: further explored*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1983), 13–16, 64–65.

⁵ See Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550–1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 1–27, esp. 20–27; and Keith Wrightson, “‘Sorts of People’ in Tudor and Stuart England” in Barry and Brooks, eds., 28–51.

⁶ Kate Mertens, *The English Noble Household 1250–1600: Good Governance and Politic Rule* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 68; and Keith Wrightson, “The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England” in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 10–46, esp. 13.

⁷ Michael Neill offers insightful and wide-ranging accounts of service in “Servant Obedience and Master Sins: Shakespeare and the Bonds of Service” in his *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 13–48; “Servile Ministers: *Othello*, *King Lear*, and the Sacralization of Service” in *Words that Count: Essays on Early Modern Authorship in Honor of MacDonald P. Jackson*, Brian Boyd, ed. (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004), 161–80; and “‘His master's ass’: Slavery, Service, and Subordination in *Othello*” in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Valencia, 2001*, Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vicente Forés, eds. (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004). See also Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (London: Macmillan, 1997); and David Evett, *The Discourses of Service in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

Our critical obsession with power has tended to obscure or pass over such reciprocal obligations by which service was closely allied to love.⁸ A measure of our distance from early modern life is evident in our inability to imagine talk of service through love and love in service as anything more than an outmoded literary trope or the ideological manipulation of exploitative power relations. I am not claiming that we should ignore such relations and return to the cozy complacency of an idealized Elizabethan world picture. But we do need to pay careful attention to how people in the early modern period negotiated Wrightson's "ambiguities and inconsistencies" as modes of both idealized and actual experience. By focusing on the imbrication of love and service in the Sonnets and *Twelfth Night*, I hope to show how they convey the institutional relations of patronage, duty, and desire in personal terms. In these texts Shakespeare is especially interested in how social institutions are transformed into more psychological and emotional ties of reciprocal affection. The ideal of reciprocity was always there, even if it did not commonly take on an erotic dimension. The God who ordains the estates of master and servant also holds the world together through His own abiding love, which in turn infuses secular being with mutually reinforcing obligations of duty and care. William Gouge, in his *Of Domesticall Dvities*, insists on the "neare bond which is betwixt master and seruants" and which, by both God's law and "the law of nature . . . [,] hath tied master and seruant together by mutuall and reciprocall bond, of doing good, as well as of receiuing good."⁹

It is well known that in such plays as *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, and *Othello*, Shakespeare explicitly registers a decline in the old, settled relations of service based on reciprocity and the rise of an unstable world of individualist interests and ambitions. We should not allow the fact that the villains of these plays speak for the new individualism to lull us into a complacent sentimentality about the actual conditions of reciprocity in what was an extremely hierarchical society. But we should also not allow our peculiar hybrid of idealism and cynicism, itself a product of the shifts marked by Shakespeare, to dismiss the controlling ideals, and perhaps even the lived experience, of the world that, in Peter Laslett's memorable phrase, we have lost. Shakespeare's Sonnets and *Twelfth Night* explore how the social and personal bonds of service are equally the conditions of the possibility and impossibility of love. The movement from one condition to the other may be traced by looking not at the poetics of praise but at the distinctive poetics of blame. By reading service as experience rather than as a literary trope, these texts draw a

⁸ See Neill, "Servile Ministers," 161–80; and Laslett, who notes that "[e]very relationship could be seen as a love relationship" (5).

⁹ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Dvities Eight Treatises* (London, 1622), 629 and 171–72; quoted here from Neill, "Servile Ministers," 164.

distinction between love as a reciprocal relationship of mutual affection, on the one hand, and desire as an exercise of will or a rehearsal of lack, on the other.

II

In Sonnets 26, 57, and 58 unequal relations of power are represented in the strongest possible way—so strongly, in fact, that their invocation of inequalities of rank and position has seemed to many commentators mere hyperbole. Sonnet 26 is the most direct of the three:

Lord of my loue, to whome in vassalage
 Thy merrit hath my dutie strongly knit;
 To thee I send this written ambassage
 To witnesse duty, not to shew my wit.
 Duty so great, which wit so poore as mine
 May make seeme bare, in wanting words to shew it;
 But that I hope some good concept of thine
 In thy soules thought (all naked) will bestow it:
 Til whatsoever star that guides my mouing,
 Points on me graciously with faire aspect,
 And puts apparrell on my tottered louing,
 To show me worthy of their sweet respect,
 Then may I dare to boast how I doe loue thee,
 Til then, not show my head where thou maist proue me[.]¹⁰

Little in this sonnet seems to suggest that the relationship it describes may be more complex or intimate than the fervent declaration of duty owed by a lowly player-poet to a patron. The invocation of vassalage within a declaration of love inseparable from the obligations of service recalls both the older, feudal relations of mutual dependence and the newer sense of general subordination that reaches beyond the specificity of feudal tenancy.¹¹ It also conveys emerging notions of baseness and slavery, from which reciprocity has all but disappeared. The poem's invocation of the transformative power of fortune places it within the context of the desire for social mobility, which both masks and declares its modern aspirations through the residual feudal language of duty and service.¹² We have become so accustomed to the

¹⁰ Quotations from the Sonnets here follow the facsimile of the 1609 quarto reproduced in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1977).

¹¹ See Neill, "Servile Ministers," 161–80. See also the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2d ed.), prep. J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. "vassal," n. and a., 2b (1500), 2[a] (1563), and 3 (1589).

¹² For an account of the shift in reciprocal relations of service from feudalism proper to "bastard feudalism" as early as the fourteenth century, see G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London: Methuen, 1975), 1–17, esp. 7.

language of unequal power relations which appears to speak in this sonnet that we consider it unremarkable, even somewhat conventional.

Sonnet 57 offers more of the same. This sonnet's hyperbolic reference to slavery invokes more clearly the late-sixteenth-century, almost wholly pejorative sense of vassalage:

BEing your slaue what should I doe but tend,
Vpon the houres, and times of your desire?
I haue no precious time at al to spend;
Nor seruices to doe til you require.
Nor dare I chide the world without end houre,
Whilst I (my soueraine) watch the clock for you,
Nor thinke the bitterness of absence sowre,
VVhen you haue bid your seruant once adieue.
Nor dare I question with my iealous thought,
VVhere you may be, or your affaires suppose,
But like a sad slaue stay and thinke of nought
Saue where you are, how happy you make those.
So true a foole is loue, that in your Will,
(Though you doe any thing) he thinkes no ill.

This declaration of abject powerlessness pushes the notion of vassalage away from that of feudal reciprocity toward a commonplace early modern conception of the servant as utterly submissive, silent, and undemanding. Such a servant was depicted emblematically as having large ass's ears and a pig's snout that was locked shut, features that conveyed his obligation to listen and his enforced silence: "Nor dare I chide . . . Nor thinke . . . Nor dare I question."¹³ He is a figure entirely subordinated to the master's will, his subjectivity subsumed by the superior's desires. Here the "dutie" repeatedly invoked in Sonnet 26 is explicated in terms of a singularly unreciprocal understanding of "service"—one that approaches the condition of slavery. And yet, especially in its closing couplet, the sonnet invokes a notion of love distinct from that professed for the "Lord of my love" in Sonnet 26. The "foole" of line 13 combines social duty with a particular form of erotic desire, evoking what appears an incommensurable collision of both tone and concept.

This clash of erotic love and social service is even more apparent in Sonnet 58:

THat God forbid, that made me first your slaue,
I should in thought controule your times of pleasure,
Or at your hand th' account of houres to craue,

¹³ See Mark Thornton Burnett, "The 'Trusty Servant': A Sixteenth-Century English Emblem," *Emblematica* 6 (1992): 237–53. Burnett discusses an image of the "trusty servant" in a sixteenth-century wall painting in Winchester College, England, and quotes parallel descriptions of the ideal servant printed in 1506 and 1543.

Being your vassail bound to staie your leisure.
 Oh let me suffer (being at your beck)
 Th' imprison'd absence of your libertie,
 And patience tame, to sufferance bide each check,
 Without accusing you of iniury.
 Be where you list, your charter is so strong,
 That you your selfe may priuiledge your time
 To what you will, to you it doth belong,
 Your selfe to pardon of selfe-doing crime.
 I am to waite, though waiting so be hell,
 Not blame your pleasure be it ill or well.

The common editorial practice of lower-casing the quarto's capital G in "God" ("THat God forbid, that made me first your slaue") pulls the opening speech act away from an invocation of a divinely sanctioned political order to an overblown cliché about the power of Cupid, or Eros. Many editors do indeed gloss the reference as pointing to a state of erotic infatuation, but the quarto's capitalization resists such a transformation of personal and political resistance into literary platitude. It signals that, while we may not want to take literally the phrase "that made me first your slaue," we should nonetheless pay attention to the possible religious and political overtones of the sonnet's opening utterance. Recalling the context of a broader hierarchy ordained by heaven, it registers the imposition on the speaker of general, political subordination—if not exactly of slavery, then certainly of service and duty. Lines 3 and 4—"Or at your hand th'account of houres to craue, / Being your vassail bound to staie your leisure"—modulate the imprecise histrionics of the slavery claim into the more historically precise notion of vassalage first invoked in Sonnet 26. This conceptual shift recalls a set of social relations that brings us closer to the material and ideological conditions of late-medieval and early modern England than is suggested by a purely erotic reading, even if we might still be inclined to take the speaker's claim somewhat metaphorically.

The poem's political irony is brought into clearer focus if we align Shakespeare's apparent equation of subjection to God's will with a contemporary condemnation of such subjection for its heretical elevation of the master's "word and will" above God's own. As Gouge asserts: "*To be a seruant in that place is not simply to be in subiection vnder another, and to doe seruice vnto him, but to be obsequious to a man, so addicted to please him, and so subiect to his will, as to doe whatsoever he will haue done: to regard nothing but his pleasure: to prefer it before Gods word and will.*"¹⁴ Nor are the distinctions between the political, the erotic, and the sacred totally clear-cut; for if we recall the degree to which passionate, sexual love was

¹⁴ Gouge, 593–94; quoted here from Neill, "Servile Ministers," 167.

consistently deplored in the Middle Ages for its idolatrous tendency to displace onto a mere human being the love and devotion properly owed to God, it becomes clear that both forms of excessive service—social and erotic—run the risk of heresy.¹⁵ When Shakespeare opens Sonnet 105 with the declaration “Let not my loue be cal’d Idolatrie,” he is thus alive both to the outrageous blasphemy of its preemptive rhetorical strike and the double nature of its heresy. As a song of praise, it encompasses both the idolatries of service that Gouge excoriates and those of sexual love demonized by such medieval theologians as St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and St. Jerome; such writers as Andreas Capellanus; and even such poets as Petrarch, for whom the struggle between divine love and human idolatry forms the central poetic tradition from which Shakespeare’s Sonnets spring.¹⁶

Echoing Galatians 6:14, the opening speech act of Sonnet 58 is a defensive response, perhaps, to a prior accusation, which witnesses in equal measure the conventional devotions of love and the obligations of institutionally (and metaphysically) sanctioned subordination and service.¹⁷ Both Sonnets 57 and 58 thus add a dimension to the invocation of love, duty, and service which is lacking (save in retrospect) from Sonnet 26: an inescapable erotic tenor that complicates the place of social and personal reciprocity in power relations. A reading that restricts the burden of subordination in this sonnet to the poet’s subjective condition—to his psychological state of hopeless infatuation—cannot give due weight to the historically specific kind of freedom accorded the aristocratic addressee. Cupid (“THat God”) may conceivably have entrapped the lover in a pathetic state of erotic admiration, but how does the writ of Eros extend to such real aristocratic prerogatives as the lord’s “privilege,” “charter,” “beck” and “pardon” *vis-à-vis* his servant, who is obliged by divinely sanctioned duty to serve by “waiting,” in all senses of the word?¹⁸

As Lynne Magnusson has shown, Sonnet 58 incorporates strategies of politeness that can be traced in the expressed relations between masters and servants

¹⁵ See Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love*, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1984).

¹⁶ See Singer, 2:209–40.

¹⁷ In his commentary on Sonnet 58, Booth notes the echo between the first words of the sonnet and Galatians 6:14: “But God forbid that I shulde rejoyce, but in the crosse of our Lord”; see Booth, ed., 233.

¹⁸ Shakespeare is in fact tracing a path between a notion of erotic love that took its informing metaphors from the feudal ideals of social and political service in twelfth-century France—the *fin’ Amours* of the troubadours—and a different medieval conception of love as an ennobling exercise in reciprocity; see Singer, 2:1–128. What is especially distinctive about Shakespeare’s Sonnets is the complete absence of the troubadour notion of service in the poems to and about the woman, and the complex struggle between the ideals of service and reciprocity in the poems concerning the young man. In the latter the erotic metaphors of service and idealization that are derived from the medieval French literary tradition are embodied in the player-poet’s actual relation of service to his well-born patron.

throughout nonliterary discourses of the period.¹⁹ The hierarchical obligations between bound “vassal” and “leisured” lord referred to in Sonnets 57 and 58 recall strictures routinely placed on lower servants in Elizabethan England. We risk obscuring that historical condition of address if, by reducing God to Cupid in Sonnet 58, we conclude that the poet’s “appropriation of the term *slave* leads us less to pity him than to resist his equation between real slavery and his own infatuation.”²⁰ Mere infatuation cannot account for the complex, contradictory registers of weakness, resentment, and disempowerment that criss-cross this poem. But it would be equally a mistake to allow a political reading of the sonnet’s speech acts to obliterate its palpable expression of erotic infatuation. The poem clearly asks to be read as one party’s retort in a lovers’ tiff—*God forbid that you should have to account for your doings, or that I should blame your pleasure!*²¹ Furthermore, its attempt to establish an *ethical* platform for reproach assumes a degree of intimacy and daring incommensurate with slavery, although it may accord well with certain types of service.

Those critics who have demonstrated that in Elizabethan sonnet sequences “love is not love” but rather the epiphenomenon of political ambition deserve our gratitude for helping us to understand these poems as historically and socially embodied utterances.²² But the polemical intensity of their interventions has tended to obscure the fact that Eros remains a central preoccupation. Love in Shakespeare’s Sonnets is not merely an instance of personal obsession, an exercise on a received idea, or the displaced locus of political ambition; it is an amalgam of all three, and more. Shakespeare’s Sonnets register simultaneously the declaration of ardent attachment and the burdened acknowledgment of a political condition. They unite rather than divorce love and duty, Eros and service, politics and personal devotion. And they do so with an unequalled insight into the nuances and shifts in *conceptual* relations.

Sonnets 57 and 58 identify the relationship with the young man as one of service, but their peculiar strategies of deference and desire complicate that intimacy by teasing out the differences between love and service. Magnusson has demonstrated how such strategies register both passive subjection and active resistance

¹⁹ Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 52–57. See also Magnusson’s “Modern Perspective” in the New Folger Library Shakespeare edition of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 355–69.

²⁰ Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard UP, 1997), 274. Vendler reads “God” in the first line of Sonnet 58 simply as “Eros” (279).

²¹ See Vendler, ed., 277.

²² The seminal essay on this topic is Arthur F. Marotti’s “‘Love is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” *ELH* 49 (1982): 396–428.

through the rhetoric of “[n]egative politeness . . . , [which] works in such a way as to simultaneously do and undo the speech actions it undertakes.”²³ By rehearsing the restrictions imposed on him as servant, Shakespeare’s player-poet implicitly indulges in the speech acts that he recognizes as prohibited. This is exemplified by Sonnet 57’s rhetorical strategy of *occupatio*, whereby the player-poet declares: “Nor dare I question with my ieaious thought, / VVhere you may be” (57.9–10). The speech act of denying his right to entertain “iealous thought[s]” confirms the fact that he has them. No slave would be free to remind his master of the hierarchy that binds them, let alone color that speech with the ironic resentment that underlies this pair of sonnets. Yet neither poem confines itself to a straightforward rehearsal of self-indulgent irony. Each offers an acute analysis of the conceptual compatibility or incompatibility of a particular notion of love and the social obligations of service. Whereas Sonnet 57 begins in a directly political vein, its couplet anticipates the opening lines of 58 by invoking the complex relationships among love, vassalage, and folly.

The intertwining of love and service in Shakespeare’s work situates their conceptual relationship much more firmly in historical experience than in the attenuated, literary-historical relations of courtly devotion. But it also disaggregates them, insofar as love (rather than mere desire) is shown to be incommensurable with a certain kind of subjection in which service slides through vassalage toward slavery. For the subservience that is both affirmed and challenged in Sonnets 57 and 58 encompasses much more than simple social powerlessness: it empties out the very subjectivity of the subordinate, transforming him into the hollow, thoughtless instrument of the addressee’s desire: “But like a sad slaue stay and thinke of nought / Saue where you are, how happy you make those” (57.11–12). The couplet of Sonnet 57 embodies the speaker in the third person, which allows him paradoxically to represent (and contest) such subjection by splitting his subordinated self into two parts—a silent object-for-another on the one hand, and an active, speaking subject on the other: “So true a foole is loue, that in your Will, / (Though you doe any thing) he thinkes no ill” (57.13–14). Furthermore, the play between “love” and “Will” widens that split. The speaker personifies love as an external figure that takes possession of “your Will,” ambivalently suggested as both himself and his master’s desire, so that what he is (name and being) is no more than an extension of his master(’s) “Will.”

The couplet also effects a crucial disjunction between two different concepts of devotion: “will,” or desire, and “love,” or affection. Insofar as the abject condition of service-as-love and love-as-service obliterates the subjectivity or will of the servant in favor of the unfettered “pleasure” of the master, there can be no *love* between the

²³ Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 50.

two of them. This point is made explicit in Sonnet 116, Shakespeare's most direct, if limited, analysis of love, where the speaker declares that Love is "not Times foole" (116.9). As is shown by the lovelorn Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and by Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the inability to call the beloved to account provokes laughter rather than sympathy. If we give serious weight to both the erotic and political aspects of service, we see that Shakespeare's Sonnets divide love into two aspects: self-centered desire and reciprocating affection. Shakespeare invokes reciprocity where, from our twenty-first-century perspective, we would least expect to find it—in the master-servant relationship. And he does so in order to highlight a desired mutuality in erotic partnerships that is ultimately unfulfilled in the relationship with the poet's master-mistress.

Shakespeare's Sonnets thus refuse to reduce the servant to the grotesque monster of the "trusty servant" emblem, precisely by apotropaically evoking that figure. But the poems do not thereby reject the necessity of service in favor of a transcendental notion of love. Instead they call for reciprocity in both its social and erotic aspects: between master and servant in a potentially beneficial social order and between lover and beloved in a mutually advantageous, intimate personal relationship. They show that the "foole . . . loue" invoked in the couplet of Sonnet 57 can act as neither the object nor the subject of love. No matter how closely convention joins the concepts, the "foole" is "true" in folly, rather than in love, because the enforced abjectness of the poet-servant empties him of the subjectivity and agency—the capacity to respond and demand—that Shakespeare's concept of love entails. Under the conditions of abjection described in Sonnet 57, Shakespeare claims, love is not and never can be love. This is a particular, not a universal, notion of love, a strikingly modern refinement of the word. The ideal of love as reciprocity would have made no sense to the devotees of the troubadours' *fin' Amours*; it would have represented a mortal danger to Petrarch; and in Aristotle and Montaigne it is reserved for friendship between equals.²⁴

III

Twelfth Night is as much a study of service and master-servant relations as it is a comedy of romantic love. The relationships and tensions between love and service found in Sonnets 57 and 58 are clearly discernible in the play's manifold variations

²⁴ See Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1953), Bk. 8; and Michel de Montaigne, "Of Friendship" in *Montaigne's Essays: John Florio's Translation*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart, 2 vols. (London: Nonesuch Press, 1931), 1:185–98. For a fine discussion of friendship in *Hamlet*, see Michael Neill, "'He that thou knowest thine': Friendship and Service in *Hamlet*" in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Volume 1, The Tragedies*, Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, eds. (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 319–38.

on Eros and duty. Every instance of desire in the play is intertwined with service: Viola's status as Orsino's servant is the condition of possibility and impossibility of her love for him and also of Olivia's erotic desire for her as Cesario; Orsino himself embodies courtly infatuation as a form of service in his dotage on Olivia; Malvolio exemplifies, Sonnet-like, the servant's fantasy of social elevation through erotic conquest; Antonio's homoerotic affection for Sebastian restates in a different key courtly devotion to the beloved as a form of service; finally, even Sir Toby follows the pattern of reciprocal service when he marries his niece's lady-in-waiting "[i]n recompence" (TLN 2535) for her gulling of Malvolio.²⁵

Given the common practice of placing the sons of gentlemen and even the nobility in service with other noble families, Viola's decision to serve the duke of Illyria does not imply any decline in social status. If she were an unmarried youth, her position in Orsino's household would be commensurate with one that her father might have negotiated for her in Messaline. She joins Curio and Valentine, both gentleman servants to the duke. Malvolio invokes his rank as a "Gentleman" to underwrite his pledge of gratitude to Feste for procuring "a Candle, and pen, inke, and paper" (TLN 2065–66). If we take this invocation at face value, then Cesario and Malvolio are of equal social rank, even if, as Olivia's steward, Malvolio holds a position more important than Cesario's in Orsino's household.²⁶ Stewards, who occupied critical positions of authority and trust, could be drawn from the yeomanry, the lesser gentry, and in some cases the upper gentry.²⁷ There is thus not a significant difference in rank between Malvolio and Cesario or even between Malvolio and the two unruly knights. Although Maria is a gentlewoman,

²⁵ Quotations from Shakespeare's plays in this essay follow the *First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*, prep. Charlton Hinman, 2d ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1996), and are cited according to Hinman's through-line numbers.

²⁶ That Cesario is Orsino's personal favorite complicates this matter, but the fact remains that Cesario is publicly little more than one of the many "gentle youths" that would have congregated in noble households for employment, favor, and education. The issue is complicated by Orsino's assurance to Olivia in regard to Sebastian: "right noble is his blood" (TLN 2430). How Orsino would know this is obscure. My point is that, in the figure of Cesario, Viola's rank as gentleman servant is little different from that of Malvolio's—unless the latter is guilty of some inexcusable breaches of protocol in his treatment of the duke's servant.

²⁷ "Families at every level of early modern society sent their children into the households of others, and families at all but the lowest levels brought others' children into their own. The opinion that all youths, whether children of nobles, gentry, yeomen, craftsmen, labourers, or paupers, became members of the labouring class by entering service was inconceivable" (Kussmaul, 9). Neill also comments on this phenomenon: "One of the hardest things to reimagine about what Peter Laslett called 'the world we have lost' is the extensiveness of its notion of 'service.' Not only did it provide the model by which all relationships involving power and authority were understood but—as the use of the term 'masterless' to define a reprobate condition of social exile indicates—it was almost impossible to conceive of a properly human existence outside the hierarchy of masters and servants that made up the 'society of orders'" ("Servant Obedience," 21).

it is acceptable for Malvolio, as steward of the household, to treat her as a subordinate.²⁸

These subtle but decisive class distinctions within the household inflame passionate rivalry. Malvolio's precedent for his own fantasy—the "yeoman of the wardrobe" who married the "Lady of the Strachy" (TLN 1054–55)—indicates a status greater than the uncontextualized social rank may suggest. Mertes suggests that the clerk of the wardrobe could be the person entrusted with the "central treasury" and sometimes with the "noble's estates."²⁹ As steward, Malvolio's authority exceeds even that of the clerk of the wardrobe, and we must assume that part of the rivalry between steward and knight lies in their disparate conditions of independence and responsibility. As a knight, Sir Toby can claim higher social rank, and even if knights themselves acted as servants to noblemen, Sir Toby's apparent social independence—his condition of being without a master—allows him to dismiss Malvolio as no more than a "steward" when the latter attempts to regulate household behavior. At the same time, Toby's financial dependence on his niece obliges him to obey the person responsible for maintaining order and accounts in that household—an order that ultimately reflects on Olivia as its head.³⁰

Both the naturalness and precariousness of service frame the initial scenes of the play. Service as a youth (or eunuch) in an aristocratic household strikes Viola as the most obvious solution to her predicament.³¹ But the speed with which she captures her new master's favor also indicates the possible capriciousness of such preference. Whether Viola likes it or not, Orsino's favoritism makes her the subject of household gossip. Despite Valentine's quick denial that the duke might be "inconstant . . . in his fauours" (TLN 256), his comment that Cesario is "like to be much aduanc'd" if the duke "continue these fauours towards [him]" (TLN 251–52) raises a general concern about reciprocal reward and incipient rivalry among servants. This rivalry is, of course, a major feature of the other aristocratic household

²⁸ Maria's position should be seen in light of the fact that, as Mertes puts it, "female household members were practically nonexistent. Those we do find are invariably chamberwomen and companions to the lady of the household and nursery servants, restricted to the private portions of the house (and often married to another servant); or laundresses, who much of the time lived outside the household" (57). Maria's triumph over Malvolio has a strong component of gender rivalry, and her marriage to Sir Toby is a signal triumph of social mobility in a context where the mere fact of service in a noble household elevated the servant's social position: "[Servants] could legitimately raise their status, and their standards of comfort and elegance, higher than that of their relatives outside the household" (Mertes, 69).

²⁹ Mertes, 81.

³⁰ See Burnett, *Masters and Servants*, 158ff; and Sonnets 36 and 89. See also Sonnets 49, 71, 110, 111, 112, 117, and 122.

³¹ For a comprehensive treatment of the uncertainty of Viola's status as a eunuch and the role of the eunuch in the history of comedy, see Keir Elam, "The Fertile Eunuch: *Twelfth Night*, Early Modern Discourse, and the Fruits of Castration," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47 (1996): 1–36.

to which Viola initially thinks of offering her services. Moreover, her position echoes Malvolio's: each is a servant of roughly similar social standing who desires to turn service into reciprocated personal attachment. But the play treats them very differently. Apart from the satirical assault on Malvolio's "sort" of Puritanism, we could ask if there is a more personal parallel between Viola's devotion to Orsino and the self-denying attachment of the Sonnets' servant-poet to his own aristocratic master. Are Malvolio's failure and punishment consequences of his role as one of the "dwellers on forme and fauor . . . Pittiful thriuors" (125.5, 8) from which the servant-poet so emphatically tries to distance himself? Why is the erotic fantasy of Orsino's servant celebrated, while that of Olivia's steward is thwarted? I shall suggest one possible and hitherto overlooked reason later in this essay.

The perceived equivalence of rank between Malvolio and Cesario is evident in Malvolio's refusal to defer to the duke's gentle-born but nonetheless "peeuish" servant (TLN 597). Cesario contravenes the fundamental protocols of politeness by behaving "rudely" (TLN 505) to both Malvolio and the countess at Olivia's gate. The upright steward, whose own service renders him acutely sensitive, notes a discrepancy between Cesario's appearance and his behavior: he may be "verie well-fauour'd," but he is also "Of verie ill manner" and speaks "shrewishly" (TLN 453, 447, 454). Cesario responds that "The rudenesse that hath appear'd in mee, haue I learn'd from my entertainment" (TLN 507-8)—at the hands of a drunk Sir Toby.³² But Cesario's "sawc[iness]" (TLN 491), as Olivia puts it, has more complex, strategic dimensions. An extension of his master's person, Cesario in fact protects Orsino with his rudeness, displacing—and thus taking the blame for—the master's obduracy. "[B]ide no deny," the duke instructs his servant (TLN 1014), who carries out the order to the letter.

Olivia's response to the duke's saucy servant begins with a series of insults, the most deliciously ironical of which is the scathing "Are you a Comedian?" Her metatheatrical question evokes the disgraceful "motley" that stains the player-poet of the Sonnets (110.2). But as in other comedies, such as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, it is the protagonist's disregard of the niceties of polite subservience that ensnares another character's erotic desires. It does not matter to Olivia that Cesario is a servant but rather that he is a *gentleman* servant. Once Olivia is assured of the rank that "marked the exact point at which the traditional social system divided up the population into two extremely unequal sections,"³³

³² See Felicity Heal, "Reciprocity and Exchange in the Late Medieval Household" in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, eds. (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996), 179-98.

³³ According to Laslett, "If you were not a gentleman, . . . you counted for little in the world outside your own household, and for almost nothing outside your small village community and its neighbourhood. . . . To exercise power, then, to be free of the society of England, to count at

she can give full rein to her desire, enslaving herself to both Cupid and the duke's servant.

Such self-enslavement echoes Sonnet 58 only if we read the sonnet in purely erotic terms. What is distinctive about the player-poet's use of the term *slave* (rather than *servant*) in the poem is its claim that his erotic and political subjugation are equally involuntary. Slavery differs from service precisely in the latter's exercise of "will," or choice. The central, punning paradox of Sonnet 58 is its claim that the player-poet's "Will," or desire, involves no capacity for choice of any kind. His divinely ordained slavery to love is enabled and hampered by a similarly ordained social enslavement to his master: he is emphatically *not* a gentleman, no matter how much he would like to be. Olivia, on the other hand, checks her enslavement by Cupid until she has ascertained the all-important social truth of her beloved's "state"; only then does she allow the "youths perfections / With an inuisible, and subtle stealth / To creepe in at [her] eyes" (TLN 591–93).

The failure of Malvolio's socio-erotic fantasy thus has little to do with his being a servant. Each of three members of the play's gentry develops an erotic interest in a servant without prompting derisive revenge or suspicions of social disparagement. Olivia, as we have seen, is herself infatuated with Orsino's servant; the duke ultimately recognizes and indulges his own devotion to Cesario/Viola, the inverted image of the servant-poet's "Master Mistris" of Sonnet 20; and Sir Toby bestows an aristocratic reward for service with his marriage to Olivia's lady-in-waiting. Service facilitates the erotic dimensions of these relationships. That is to say, far from being a hindrance to intimacy, service creates the conditions for the development of personal affection and erotic desire—for love, not merely as the loyal bond of duty toward a superior but, crucially, as "mutuall render onely me for thee" (125.12). This is particularly true for Orsino and Viola. The circumstances of Viola's relation to Orsino—especially in the familiarity of a homosocial relationship uncontaminated by heterosexual tension—prepares the ground for a kind of intimacy that would be impossible if she were acting as a woman. It is Viola's abject submission of her will to Orsino's desire—in the manner of the servant-poet of the Sonnets—which opens the space for an intimacy that encompasses more than the mere social advancement of a favored servant or "Pittiful thriuor." Like the poet of the Sonnets, Viola "tend[s], / Vpon the houres, and times" of her aristocratic master's "desire," having "no precious time at al to spend; / Nor seruices to doe til [he] require" (57.2–4). Her complete attentiveness to his will provokes promises of material reward and, ultimately, freedom from service; but all Viola really wants is a transformation of the conditions of her service from page to wife:

all as an active agent in the record we call historical, you had to have the status of a gentleman" (27–28).

Du. . . prosper well in this,
 And thou shalt liue as freely as thy Lord,
 To call his fortunes thine.
Vio. Ile do my best
 To woe your Lady: yet barrefull strife,
 Who ere I woe, my selfe would be his wife.
 (TLN 289–94)

At the same time, however, service also renders questionable the possibility of true reciprocity in the unfolding of erotic attraction. Service is the condition of possibility for love; but, as noted earlier, it is equally its condition of impossibility. However intimate a relationship Viola establishes with Orsino as confidant and wooer by proxy, her role as servant also requires the suppression of her own subjectivity. Her master's confidence, including a misogynist dismissal of the love that women can bear to men, traps her into splitting herself, like the speaker of Sonnet 57, into two distinct figures. She can contest what is in effect an attack on her integrity only by remaking and distancing herself as a fictitious "male" persona, whose youthful inexperience can bear witness to the constancy of female devotion by reinventing for itself a sister whose "history" of unrequited constancy turns out to be a "blanke" (TLN 998–99). Viola can therefore embody her real, differently gendered condition only as the self-effacing Cesario. The most disconcerting aspect of *Twelfth Night*—one apt to be disregarded in the celebratory sweep of its romantic closure—is the transformation by which Orsino's all-consuming fantasy converts his servant from the close confidant of his desires into the female object of those desires. Everything that we have seen of Orsino's notion of heterosexual love should make us grateful for the much-noted deferral of the moment at which Cesario is turned from faithful servant-companion not back into Viola but into the duke's "fancies Queene" (TLN 2558).

Magnusson has demonstrated that the self-denial expected of servants in the period is part of a set of transpersonal discourses that inform a range of early modern genres. Viola-as-Cesario is trapped in the discourse and the relations of power characteristic of master-servant relationships. These disallow Viola from occupying the subject position of an actively desiring woman. But they nevertheless enable her to channel her erotic desires into the selfless, servant-like devotion of Sonnets 57 and 58, even if such devotion brings little immediate sexual reciprocity. In this respect *Twelfth Night* inverts the narrative of Sonnet 20, in which Nature, in the process of creating a woman, falls in love with her creation and turns her into the beautiful young man, "the Master Mistris of [the poet's] passion" (20.2). The comedy rewrites the tripartite rivalry of the sonnet—desiring Nature, the "Master Mistris," and the excluded servant-poet—as a similarly structured but inverted rivalry among desiring Olivia, the "Masters Mistris" (TLN 2492), and the initially

excluded duke. This time the older man triumphs. The bar to sexual reciprocity between poet and young man, imposed by desiring Nature's self-centered transformation of her creature from female to male, is paralleled by Olivia's hopeless desire for Cesario: if Nature created the sonnet's young man "for a woman" (20.9), Olivia works against Nature's "bias" (TLN 2426) by taking Cesario "for a man."³⁴ The triumph of female desire (in the form of Nature and Olivia, respectively) is fantasized away in the comedy by allowing the prohibited object (Cesario) to be miraculously transformed back into a woman (Viola), thereby thwarting Olivia, just as Phebe's desire for Ganymede is deflected onto Silvius in *As You Like It*.

But if the physical transformation from Ganymede to Rosalind is central to *As You Like It's* dénouement, the deferral of Cesario's change back to Viola means that the phenomenological time of audience perception matches the real time of the boy-actor who in the Epilogue of *As You Like It* crucially reaffirms his real gender. Cesario never becomes a woman. Nature's bias is asserted only as fantasy, as something that blocks female desire but allows same-sex love in the "two hours' traffic" of the stage (*Romeo and Juliet*, TLN 12). The difference between love and desire is what is at stake here, inextricably interlaced with the bonds of service. The "golden service" (TLN 2122) that Orsino has received from Cesario is the enabling condition for the rapid redirection of his desire's circuit from Olivia to Viola, but that desire rests on a person whom he already *loves*. Indeed, if the play shows us anything, it is the qualitative difference between Orsino's desire for Olivia and his love for Cesario. As the male servant Cesario, Viola can develop a kind and degree of intimacy with Orsino that would be unlikely if not impossible were he a woman. And the fact that such reciprocal intimacy is informed by an exclusive, boys'-club misogyny about the unreliability of female affection reflects not merely the dark gynophobia of the Sonnets but also their sense that whereas women *desire*, men *love*. The concept of service is absent from the sonnets traditionally thought to be addressed to the dark lady,³⁵ but it plays a central role in another same-sex relationship in *Twelfth Night*—that between Viola's brother, Sebastian, and his sea-captain rescuer, Antonio.

Antonio's homoerotic partnership with Sebastian offers a variation on the theme of service, love, and sexual rivalry. Each twin owes his or her rescue to a "sea captain," but their respective social and personal relations to their rescuers differ. Conversation between Viola and her captain is inflected by hierarchical markers of

³⁴ For a (contested) discussion of sexuality and Nature's "bias" in *Twelfth Night*, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1988), 66–93.

³⁵ The concept of slavery is indeed invoked in the sonnets after Sonnet 126, but it does not carry the complex overtones of service as I have been analyzing that concept here.

respect and authority. Viola immediately assumes an appreciative but distant attitude of command, patronizingly commenting on his “faire behaiour” (TLN 99), repeatedly addressing him as “thee” and “thou” (TLN 71, 99, 101–3), and offering to pay him “bounteously” (TLN 104) for his help. (Compare her own refusal of Olivia’s money, asserting that she is “no feede poast” [TLN 579]).³⁶ Her position *vis-à-vis* the captain is precisely the position of an aristocrat *vis-à-vis* a servant. While there is clearly a difference of class between Sebastian and Antonio, their language reflects a much greater degree of equality and intimacy. It is Antonio who gives Sebastian his purse and who takes command of the latter’s plans, even if, initially, Sebastian refuses Antonio’s company on the grounds that he would not want his own plight to impinge on his friend. That is to say, his insistence on continuing alone arises out of a reciprocal concern to prevent the “malignancie of [his] fate” to “distemper” that of the man who has shown him much kindness: “It were a bad recompence for your loue, to lay any of [my euils] on you” (TLN 615–18). Faced with Sebastian’s inconsolable grief at his sister’s supposed death—which echoes Olivia’s withdrawal from company—Antonio pleads to be his servant, thus reiterating the notion that service is a *means* to the reciprocity of love, and following the same trajectory by which Viola follows her affection for Orsino.

The conversation between the two men is marked by complex patterns of negative politeness. This is especially significant considering the revelation of Sebastian’s gentle birth: “you must know of mee then *Antonio*, my name is *Sebastian* (which I call’d *Rodorigo*) my father was that *Sebastian* of *Messaline*, whom I know you haue heard of” (TLN 624–27).³⁷ Sebastian, through the strategies of polite distancing of near equals, parries Antonio’s attempts to establish an intimate connection, while Antonio begs to devote himself to the other in a mode reminiscent of the servant-poet of the Sonnets: “O let me true in loue but truly write” (21.9). But Sebastian’s distancing does not invoke the class-derived authority of Viola’s speech to her sea captain. Sebastian and Antonio appeal equally to a protocol of reciprocity that we recognize in modern speech acts: one distances oneself from another without insult or injury by expressing a concern for their well-being and comfort, and presuming in turn their own goodwill:

Ant. Pardon me sir, your bad entertainment.

Seb. O good *Antonio*, forgiue me your trouble.

Ant. If you will not murther me for my loue, let mee be your seruant.

³⁶ By refusing Olivia’s money, Viola is distancing herself socially from servants who, like Feste, make a living by taking wages from those they serve. Throughout the play there is a pointed rivalry between Feste, probably the lowliest servant in the household, and Viola. See Neill, “Servant Obedience,” 41.

³⁷ My thanks to Lars Engle for drawing this point to my attention.

Seb. If you will not vndo what you haue done, that is kill him, whom you
haue recouer'd, desire it not.

(TLN 640–45)

Sebastian and Antonio both use the respectful *you* and *your* in this dialogue, whereas it comes naturally to Viola to address her rescuer with the condescending *thou*.³⁸ Such linguistic strategies of politeness are usually employed among equals, and here they signal a subtle difference between the kinds of service each seeks. The service sought by Antonio is much closer to the devotion induced by Cupid. Yet for all the conventional familiarity of his conversation with Sebastian, he is in fact pleading to be allowed to be Sebastian's servant in the *literal* sense, because such service offers the opportunity for him to indulge his passionate attachment to his friend. In the Sonnets service to the master-friend means having to endure the "bitternesse of absence sowre" (57.7), while in *Twelfth Night* service is a way to overcome such unendurable distance.

Unlike her counterparts in Shakespeare's other comedies, Viola experiences her transformation into a boy as a form of imprisonment. Although she plays her part with admirable forthrightness and self-sufficiency in Orsino's service—perhaps it is for this quality that Olivia falls in love with her—her commitment to such service goes beyond even the self-sacrificial poses of the Sonnets' servant-poet. In a show of ecstatic devotion, Viola finally "comes out" by declaring her complete willingness to sacrifice her life to appease her master's jealousy:

Vio. And I most iocund, apt, and willinglie,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would dye.
Ol. Where goes *Cesario*?
Vio. After him I loue,
More than I loue these eyes, more then my life. . . .
(TLN 2288–92)

Viola abandons herself to the "whirlegigge of time" (TLN 2546–47); unlike the Sonnets' poet, she can depend on the fact of her gender and inherited status, and can therefore assume that the passage of time will finally rescue her: "O time, thou must vntangle this, not I, / It is too hard a knot for me t'vnty" (TLN 696–97). As it turns out, her trust that time will untangle misunderstandings is justified. The duke's requital of her devotion is couched in the language and gesture of manumission: he offers himself as a reciprocal reward for services performed, even if he does not withdraw the title of master with the gift of his hand:

Du. . . . Your Master quits you: and for your seruice done him,
So much against the mettle of your sex,

³⁸ For a discussion of the "language of status," see Michael Neill, "'This Gentle Gentleman': Social Change and the Language of Status in *Arden of Faversham*" in *Putting History to the Question*, 49–72.

So farre beneath your soft and tender breeding,
 And since you call'd me Master, for so long:
 Heere is my hand, you shall from this time bee
 your Masters Mistris.

(TLN 2487–92)

Orsino uses the language of reciprocal obligation between master and servant to express the reciprocity of erotic affection. It is impossible to account for the quality of Viola's feelings for her master by categorizing them as either "real" sexual desire or the feigned devotion of a servant. Her desire is deeply informed by her internalized commitment to service, while Orsino's affection for her cannot be divorced from that male intimacy which allowed him to "vnclasp. . . / To [Cesario] the booke euen of [his] secret soule" (TLN 262–63).

In the three relationships—servant-poet and master-friend, Viola and Orsino, and Antonio and Sebastian—literal service, sexual desire, and loving devotion intersect in complex ways. The submission required by service infringes on the possibility, quality, and reciprocity of love and desire. Yet service also makes love possible. The ideal of reciprocity that informs the concept of service also holds out the promise of reciprocity in sexual love. In the Sonnets and in the Antonio/Sebastian relationship what seems at first to be a position of powerlessness on the part of the servant-lover is transformed into an authority characteristic of an older man's relation to a younger. The older men gradually assert their independence and command in both the Sonnets and the comedy, ending with a disillusioned excoriation of fickle, selfish, and ungrateful youth (TLN 2487–92).

This returns us to another example of love-in-service as thwarted rather than fulfilled desire. Even if his status as a servant is not germane, there are many reasons why Malvolio's combined desire for erotic and social advancement is checked. The most obvious are the demands of comic form or the comic usefulness of his being a "kinde of Puritane" (TLN 833). But commentators have overlooked the steward as spokesman for the reciprocal obligations of service as a relationship of mutual respect and care. Scarcely ten lines after Orsino's acknowledgment of his reciprocal bonds of love and service with Cesario in Act 5, Malvolio powerfully expresses the Sonnets' shift from the poetics of praise to those of blame.

Malvolio's letter of rebuke to Olivia, read out in public, shows no concern for the proscriptions rehearsed in Sonnets 57 and 58, especially regarding the denial of a servant's right to "accus[e]" the master or mistress "of iniury" (58.8). Acknowledging that, in levelling his accusation, he "leau[e]s [his] duty a little vnthought of," Malvolio nonetheless presumes his right to "speake out of [his] iniury" (TLN 2476–77). The letter is shockingly direct. It ignores conventions designed to attenuate its unconstrained anger and indignation—even derision. Above all, Malvolio presumes a right to shame his mistress for her inappropriate

treatment of him, in direct contrast to the poet-servant's concession to his master-friend: "your charter is so strong, / That you your selfe may priuiledge your time / To what you will, to you it doth belong, / Your selfe to pardon of selfe-doing crime" (58.9–12). The opening oath of Malvolio's letter inverts the "THat God forbid" with which Sonnet 58 begins: "By the Lord Madam," he writes, "you wrong me, and the world shall know it" (TLN 2469–70). Noting "yet haue I the benefit of my senses as well as your Ladieship," he goes on to promise to "do my self much right, or you much shame" (TLN 2472–75). Olivia's steward thus expresses, in the most forceful, public terms, the duty of care and reciprocity expected of magisterial relationships, and it is especially significant that he should in the end reject all protocols of duty, service, and social distinction by vowing "Ile be reueng'd on the whole packe of you" (TLN 2548).

I will return shortly to the question of revenge in the Sonnets. For the moment, however, I wish to dwell briefly on the poetics of blame that develop out of the rhetoric and condition of abject service, and on how that condition is embodied onstage. Malvolio's complaint against his mistress is, of course, unjustified. His abominable treatment arises from the bitter rivalry that was common at the time among servants within the aristocratic household.³⁹ Even if the charge does not ultimately hit its mark, the mis-taken context allows for an unrestrained, public expression of blame that would have resonated with the fantasies of those audience members who were themselves in positions of service. Such complaint, moreover, reiterates an attack by another servant who feels that his service has not been properly reciprocated. I'm referring to the bitterness that Antonio, like his counterpart in the Sonnets, displays about a duplicitous, self-centered, and "ingrateful boy" to whom he had devoted his love: "a wracke past hope he was: / His life I gaue him, and did thereto adde / My loue without retention, or restraint, / All his in dedication" (TLN 2231–34).

Like Malvolio's letter, Antonio's complaint—addressed to the Cesario he takes for Sebastian—powerfully expresses moral outrage at the aristocracy's perceived failure to reciprocate love and service. Its inefficacy does not detract from the rhetorical occasion of its expression. Viola may not be guilty as charged, but she provides an imaginary target for genuine outrage about the "selfe-doing crime" (58.12) of careless young noblemen. The charge against Viola is, in fact, applicable to Sebastian, who, despite his appreciation of Antonio's "golden seruice," grows "a twentie yeeres remoued thing / While one would winke" (TLN 2122, 2241–42),

³⁹ For an account of the rivalry that beset a typical noble household, see Alice T. Friedman, *House and Household in Elizabethan England: Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1989), 38ff; Friedman observes, "while ceremonial occasions were designed to present an image of order and control, behind the scenes relationships were rife with faction and intrigue" (43).

even though comedy requires the accusation to be circuited harmlessly through his sister.

I have suggested that Cesario/Viola offers an inversion of the narrative of Sonnet 20, an inversion in which the gender change of the desired object of affection creates a passage, rather than an obstacle, to an erotic relationship. The comedy's provision of a clone in all but gender gives Nature her due while fulfilling the fantasy of the older man. But it pointedly excludes the devoted affection of another rival in love, whom the play simply silences after entertaining his cathartic expression of (imagined) betrayal. Following Joel Fineman's insight into the difference between Shakespeare's comedy of presentation and the Sonnets' pathos of representation, we may return, via the muted figure of Antonio as thwarted servant-lover, to the servant-poet of the Sonnets and his peculiar poetics of blame and revenge.⁴⁰

IV

One does not have to endorse a particular narrative in the Sonnets to feel that some of the poems' richness can be comprehended only in their dialogue with others.⁴¹ Thus, while Sonnets 57 and 58 offer an emotional and political complication of more straightforwardly abject sonnets, such as Sonnet 26, their discourse regarding love and service is finally replaced in later poems by an achieved independence. In these the speaker offers a "mutuall render" (125.12) that transcends not only the humility of the middle sonnets but also the social condition of service itself. The Sonnets' relentless conceptual analysis of love in its relation to service departs from the conflation of love and service in *Twelfth Night*. The abject devotion expressed in Sonnet 26 and posited ironically in Sonnets 57 and 58 is ultimately incompatible with the reciprocity that is love's essence. The very aspects that make love possible in conditions of service are thus, in the final analysis, found to thwart it. The later sonnets to the master offer a more hard-headed view of service as the self-seeking "policy" (124.9) of an Iago or an Edmund. There is a potential identity between the poet's "I am that I am" (121.9), the Venetian ensign's "I am not what I am" (*Othello*, TLN 71), and Viola's identical "I am not what I am" (*Twelfth Night*, TLN 1356).⁴²

⁴⁰ See Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California P, 1986), 297–307.

⁴¹ Compare Heather Dubrow's argument against the traditional division of the Sonnets in "Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd: The Politics of Plotting Shakespeare's Sonnets" in *SQ* 47 (1996): 291–305. See also Magnusson, "Modern Perspectives," 359.

⁴² Neill writes of the demystification of the traditional notions of reciprocity in relations of service in the period: "In this world of progressively demystified relationships, most household service was coming to seem like a form of wage-slavery, more and more difficult to reconcile . . . with honor

To explore this point, let us consider Sonnet 120, a late poem that returns to the question of reciprocity through the question of forgiveness, but in a peculiarly contorted and ambivalent way:

THat you were once vnkind be-friends mee now,
 And for that sorrow, which I then didde feele,
 Needes must I vnder my transgression bow,
 Vnlesse my Nerues were brasse or hammered steele.
 For if you were by my vnkindnesse shaken
 As I by yours, y'haue past a hell of Time,
 And I a tyrant haue no leasure taken
 To waigh how once I suffered in your crime.
 O that our night of wo might haue remembred
 My deepest sence, how hard true sorrow hits,
 And soone to you, as you to me then tendred
 The humble salue, which wounded bosomes fits!
 But that your trespasse now becomes a fee,
 Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransome mee.

Unlike the earlier sonnets, this poem contains none of the protocols of politeness associated with service. The former negation of subjectivity is now replaced by a confident self-possession and sense of equality. The speaker acknowledges necessity as he did before, but now it is accepted voluntarily as a form of ethical reciprocity: "And for that sorrow, which I then didde feele, / Needes must I vnder my transgression bow, / Vnlesse my Nerues were brasse or hammered steele" (120.2–4). He opens himself up voluntarily to be judged, rather than accepting such judgment as the divinely ordained condition of his being. At first sight the poem seems to be built on an inexorable logic of mutual empathy and forgiveness in which the other is treated as an extension of the speaking self: "For if you were by my vnkindnesse shaken / As I by yours, y'haue past a hell of Time" (120.5–6).

The sonnet heaps blame, however, even as it pleads for mutual exoneration. If it says *I know, from my own experience, how you are feeling*, it also implies, *I hope you now know just how badly you made me suffer*. While it does not indulge in the un-servantlike outrage of Malvolio or Antonio, it nevertheless contains something more discomfiting: a conviction that reciprocity obeys the logic of the double-entry ledger. An earlier moral failing is reckoned a credit that cancels the new ethical

or gentility" ("Servant Obedience," 33). A contemporary tract on service, Gervase Markham's *A Health to the Gentlemanly profession of Seruingmen: or, The Seruingmans Comfort . . .* (London, 1598), deplores the slow decline of service as fewer members of the gentry consider it an appropriate profession. This decline is noted by a number of historians and critics, including Neill, "Servant Obedience"; Burnett, *Masters and Servants*; Friedman; and Mertes.

debt. It is the young aristocrat who now bears the burden of necessity: "Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom mee" (120.14). We are as far away from the abjection of Sonnet 26 as it is possible to get. But the discourse that replaces both the earlier abjection and the more equitable notions of quittance developed in *Twelfth Night* are both far from the "mutuall render" sought in Sonnet 120, where the quest for reciprocity is expressed most forcefully. Ransom is, of course, what is transacted in war, between enemies. That the poet now speaks as an equal—and that this poem is ostensibly an acceptance of an apology—does not necessarily prove the reciprocity of affection or love, even if it does break free of the bonds of service.

Transcending the earlier poems of desire, Sonnet 120 confirms the peculiar Shakespearean paradox whereby service is simultaneously the condition of possibility and impossibility of love. As in Cesario's relation to Orsino, service enables the intimacy that grows out of the first 126 sonnets; but as in Malvolio's relation to Olivia, the continued hierarchical nature of such reciprocity renders mutual love impossible. We see, then, that while reciprocity is entirely compatible with the demands of service, there are ethical dimensions to the concept of love as Shakespeare develops it (the demand for equality of obligation) that make love and service incompatible. The very relationships that hold them together also wrench them apart.

We can now return to the question of revenge. Sonnet 126, the last poem addressed to the young man, is the steward's revenge:

O Thou my louely Boy who in thy power,
 Doest hould times fickle glasse, his sickle, hower:
 Who hast by wayning growne, and therein shou'st,
 Thy louers withering, as thy sweet selfe grow'st.
 If Nature (soueraine misteres ouer wrack)
 As thou goest onwards still will plucke thee backe,
 She keepes thee to this purpose, that her skill.
 May time disgrace, and wretched mynuit kill.
 Yet feare her O thou minnion of her pleasure,
 She may detaine, but not still keepe her tresure!
 Her *Audite* (though delayd) answer'd must be,
 And her *Quietus* is to render thee.
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Opening with a rhetoric of condescending familiarity—"O Thou my louely Boy"—the poem records a dramatic switch of allegiance and a chillingly restrained withdrawal of all that has up to now been given in the young man's service: namely the promise to cancel his debt to time by offering everlasting beauty and infinite life in "these blacke lines" (63.13). There is something especially disturbing about

the poet's transformation of himself not into the rival of desiring Nature, as in Sonnet 20, but rather into her servant and auditor. In that new office he now endorses everything that he, as the young man's "slaue," had formerly promised to defy. As her steward, who had in his previous service sought to "repaire" rather than "ruinate" the "beautious rooffe" of aristocratic settlement (10.7-8), the servant-poet now chillingly underwrites the inevitable "*Audite*": the "*Quietus*" through which Nature, Shylock-like, will call in her certain bond against the poet's beautiful, careless master.