Stand in the plague of custom and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me?
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why 'bastard'? Wherefore 'base'?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With 'base'? with 'baseness'? 'bastardy'? 'base, base'?
Who in the lusty stealth of nature take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed
Go to th'creating a whole tribe of fops
Got 'tween a sleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard, Edmond,
As to th'legitimate. Fine word, 'legitimate'.

4 me?] F; me, Q 6 brother?] F; brother, Q 6 'base'?] F; base, Q 9 issue?] F; issue, Q 10 With 'base'? with 'baseness'? 'bastardy'? 'base, base'?] With Base? With basenes Barstardie? Base, Base? F; base, base bastardie? Q 13 dull, stale, tired] F; stale dull lyed Q 14 th'creating] F; the creating of Q 15 a sleep] Q, F; asleep *Capell* 15 then,] F; the Q 16 land.] land, Q, F 17 love] Q; loue, F 18 th'legitimate] F; the legitimate Q 18 Fine word, 'legitimate'] F; *not in* Q

3 custom convention, usage with the force of law.

4 curiosity of nations 'Edmund probably owes his word, *curiosity* – which he appears to use here in the sense of capricious refinement, with an overtone of officious meddling – to Florio, and the attitude behind it to Montaigne, who insistently contrasts Nature and Custom' (Salingar, p. 122). Salingar cites relevant passages from the *Essais*, and Muir from the *Apology for Raymond Sebonde*.

4 me? Most editors continue the query to 6, but F appears right in making the break here. Edmond is vexed at being 'deprived', or denied an inheritance; he then considers the two counts against him: he is a younger brother, and he is illegitimate.

5 For that Because.

5 moonshines months.

6 Lag of Behind, later than.

6 Why . . . 'base' His bastardy concerns Edmond more than Edgar's seniority. Hence, in the following lines he wrings from the terms 'bastard' and 'base' and their derivatives (the two terms are not, however, etymologically related) as much of their meaning as he can, both through the figure of repetition and through what seems to him logical questioning. (Compare Falstaff on 'honour', *1H4* 5.1.127–41.) Edmond challenges the assumption that being base-born implies being base in other respects. Salingar, pp. 123–4, believes this passage is indebted in part to Montaigne's essay, 'Upon Some Verses of Virgil'.

7 dimensions bodily proportions; as in *MV* 3.1.61.

7 compact composed, formed.

8 generous i.e. lofty, magnanimous, as befits a gentleman; as in *Ham.* 4.7.135.

8 true proper, correct, 'truly stamped' (Muir).

9 honest chaste.

11 lusty . . . nature 'stealthy enjoyment of natural sexual appetite' (Riverside).

11–12 take . . . quality Either (1) receive more physical and mental ingredients and energetic traits, or (2) require a greater and more vigorous physical and mental constitution. Both senses of 'take' may be active here.

13 a dull . . . bed i.e. the result of a long marriage.

14 fops fools.

15 Got Begot.

15 a sleep Capell's emendation, making one word, is unnecessary.

17–18 Our father's . . . legitimate The warrant for this statement is Gloucester's speech, 1.1.17–8 (Hunter).

Well, my legitimate, [*Takes out a letter*] if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmond the base
Shall to th'legitimate. I grow; I prosper;
Now gods, stand up for bastards!

Side #6 End here.

Side #7 Start here (Edmond, Gloucester)

Enter GLOUCESTER

GLOUCESTER Kent banished thus? and France in choler parted?
And the king gone tonight? Prescribed his power,
Confined to exhibition? All this done
Upon the gad? Edmond, how now? What news?

EDMOND So please your lordship, none. [*Putting up the letter*]

GLOUCESTER Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?

EDMOND I know no news, my lord.

GLOUCESTER What paper were you reading?

EDMOND Nothing, my lord.

GLOUCESTER No? What needed then that terrible dispatch of it into your pocket? The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see. Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles.

19 SD] *This edn; not in* Q, F 21 to th'] F; tooth' Q; top th' *Capell (conj. Edwards)* 23 thus? . . . parted?] F; thus, . . . parted, Q 24 tonight?] F; to night Q 24 Prescribed] F; subscribd Q 25 exhibition?] F; exhibition, Q 26 gad?] F; gadde; Q 27 SD] *Rowe; not in* Q, F 32 needed] F; needes Q 32 terrible] Q2, F; terribe Q

19 speed succeed.

20 invention device.

21 Shall to th'legitimate i.e. shall advance to, or take the place of, usurp, the legitimate. Nichols (cited by Furness) first proposed this interpretation of the Q, F reading in 1861–2 as against Edwards's emendation, 'top th' legitimate', which editors since Capell have generally adopted. Sisson, without citing Nichols, also defends the original reading, and articles by Thomas Clayton and Malcolm Pittock, both in *N&Q* 31 (June 1984), 207–10, present cogent arguments for 'disemending' the text. As Clayton says, 'Though differently arrived at, the forceful complementarity claimed for "top" . . . is there still' (p. 208). Moreover, other F alterations in this passage make it unlikely that the Q reading was overlooked (pp. 207–8); and as Pittock shows, *OED* gives numerous examples of an ellipsis after 'to' (p. 209).

22 Now . . . bastards Heilman (pp. 102 and 314 n. 16) notes the ambiguities here: since 'stand up' may refer to male sexual tumescence (as in *Rom.* 2.1.25, 3.3.88), Edmond's prayer becomes a phallic ritual; and he proceeds immediately to behave in the pejorative sense of 'bastard'.

23 thus? F's question marks throughout this speech, except for the last one, may be intended as exclamation points, as Muir interprets them, but a querying or wondering tone seems more appropriate for Gloucester here.

23 in choler Apparently something went wrong during the 'compliment of leave-taking' referred to at 1.1.293.

23 parted departed.

24 tonight last night; as in *Rom.* 1.4.50, *MV* 2.5.18.

24 Prescribed Limited, restricted.

25 Confined to exhibition Limited to an allowance. Compare *TGV* 1.3.68–9.

26 Upon the gad i.e. suddenly, as if pricked or goaded (a gad is a sharp spike or spear).

28 put up stow, conceal.

31 Nothing The word reverberates throughout the first half of the play. Compare 1.1.82–5, 1.4.113–15, 2.2.148, 2.3.21.

32 terrible dispatch extremely hasty disposition.

35 spectacles Spectacles are a symbol of what Gloucester does need. He does not see through Edmond's plot and shows himself entirely 'credulous' (Heilman, pp. 45, 154).

EDMOND I beseech you, sir, pardon me; it is a letter from my brother that I have not all o'erread; and for so much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your o'erlooking.

GLOUCESTER Give me the letter, sir.

EDMOND I shall offend either to detain or give it. The contents, as in part I understand them, are too blame.

GLOUCESTER Let's see, let's see.

EDMOND I hope for my brother's justification he wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.

[*Gives him the letter*]

GLOUCESTER *Reads* 'This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times, keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways not as it hath power but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue forever and live the beloved of your brother. Edgar.' Hum! Conspiracy! 'Sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue.' My son Edgar, had he a hand to write this? a heart and brain to breed it in? When came you to this? Who brought it?

EDMOND It was not brought me, my lord; there's the cunning of it. I found it thrown in at the casement of my closet.

GLOUCESTER You know the character to be your brother's?

EDMOND If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his: but in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

36 SH EDMOND] *Bast.* F; *not in* Q *uncorr.*; *Ba.* Q *corr.* 37 and] F; *not in* Q 38 o'erlooking] ore-looking F; liking Q 40–1 I . . . blame.] *As prose* Q; *three verse lines ending* . . . giue it: / . . . them, / . . . blame. F 44 SD] *This edn; not in* Q, F 45 SD] F; *not in* Q, *which inserts /A Letter / after 44* 45–52 This . . . brother.] F *prints in italics*, Q *in roman* 45 and reverence] F; *not in* Q 52 Sleep] F; slept Q *52 waked] wakt Q; wake F 55 you to this] F; this to you Q

38 o'erlooking inspection, perusal.

41 too blame too blameworthy. As recorded in *OED* Blame *v* 5, the dative infinitive, *to blame*, was much used as the predicate after *be*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the *to* was misunderstood as *too*, and *blame* was taken as an adjective meaning 'blameworthy, culpable'. Compare *1H4* 3.1.175: 'In faith, my lord, you are too willful blame', cited *OED*, Schmidt. Bevington emends 'to blame', but says the Q/F reading, followed here, may be correct.

44 essay or taste trial or sample, i.e. test. 'Essay' is etymologically the same as 'assay'.

45 policy . . . age policy of revering the old: hendiadys (Schmidt). 'Policy' suggests 'a clever trick on the part of the aged' (Kittredge).

46 best . . . times best years of our lives.

47–8 idle and fond useless and foolish.

48–9 who . . . suffered which rules not as though it had real power, but because it is permitted to do so.

57 casement A window opening on hinges.

57 closet private room; as in *Ham.* 2.1.74, 3.2.331.

58 character handwriting.

59 matter substance (of the letter's contents).

60 that i.e. the 'matter'.

60 fain gladly, willingly.

GLOUCESTER It is his.

EDMOND It is his hand, my lord, but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

GLOUCESTER Has he never before sounded you in this business?

EDMOND Never, my lord. But I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age, and fathers declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

GLOUCESTER O villain, villain – his very opinion in the letter! Abhorred villain, unnatural, detested, brutish villain – worse than brutish! Go, sirrah, seek him: I'll apprehend him. Abominable villain, where is he?

EDMOND I do not well know, my lord. If it shall please you to suspend your indignation against my brother till you can derive from him better testimony of his intent, you should run a certain course; where if you violently proceed against him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great gap in your own honour and shake in pieces the heart of his obedience. I dare pawn down my life for him that he hath writ this to feel my affection to your honour and to no other pretence of danger.

GLOUCESTER Think you so?

EDMOND If your honour judge it meet, I will place you where you shall hear us confer of this and by an auricular assurance have your satisfaction, and that without any further delay than this very evening.

61 his.] F; his? Q 64 Has] F; Hath Q 64 before] F; heretofore Q 65 heard him oft] F; often heard him Q 66 declined] F; declining Q 66 the father] F; his father Q 67 his] F; the Q 70 sirrah] F; sir Q 70 I'll] F; I Q; I, Q2; Ay, *Cam.* 72 lord. If] F; Lord, if Q 74 his] F; this Q 78 that he hath writ] F; he hath wrote Q 79 other] F; further Q

62 hand handwriting.

64 sounded searched, examined: a nautical metaphor (Kittredge).

66 perfect fully mature.

66–7 father . . . revenue Citing references to Pettie, Florio, and Montaigne, Muir suggests that this notion (that aged parents should be under the guardianship of their children) was not unfamiliar in Shakespeare's time; indeed, it is now Lear's position, as Verity (cited by NS) remarks. Compare Lady Wildgoose's action against her father, Sir Brian Annesley (p. 4 above).

69 Abhorred Abhorrent. 'Participles in *-ed* are common in this use' (Kittredge).

69 detested detestable.

70 sirrah Familiar term of address to children or subordinates.

71 Abominable The Q/F spelling, 'Abhominable', reflects the Elizabethan belief that the term derived from Latin *ab* + *homine*, 'away from man', hence 'unnatural', 'execrable'.

74–5 you . . . course your course of action would be sure.

75 where whereas.

76 gap breach.

77 shake . . . obedience i.e. utterly destroy the essence of his devotion.

78 pawn stake.

78 feel test.

79 pretence of danger dangerous purpose. Compare *Mac.* 2.3.131.

81 meet fitting, proper.

82 auricular assurance i.e. certainty derived from hearing directly.

GLOUCESTER He cannot be such a monster. Edmond, seek him out: wind me into him, I pray you. Frame the business after your own wisdom. I would unstate myself to be in a due resolution.

EDMOND I will seek him, sir, presently, convey the business as I shall find means, and acquaint you withal.

GLOUCESTER These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. In cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction: there's son against father. The king falls from bias of nature, there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmond, it shall lose thee nothing. Do it carefully. And the noble and true-hearted Kent banished; his offence, honesty. 'Tis strange. *Exit*

85 monster.] F *omits three lines here* 86 the] F; your Q 89 will] F; shall Q 90 find] F; see Q 92 it] F; *not in* Q 95 discord; in palaces] F; discords, Pallaces Q 95 and the] F; the Q 96 'twixt] F; betweene Q 96–100 This . . . graves.] F; *not in* Q 97 prediction:] prediction F 97 father.] Father, F 103 honesty. 'Tis strange.] F; honest, strange, strange! Q 103 SD] F; *not in* Q

85 monster F omits two lines here found in Q. See Textual Analysis, p. 265 below.

86 wind me insinuate yourself (ethical dative construction; compare *Oth.* 1.1.49).

86 Frame Fashion.

87–8 I . . . resolution I would divest myself of estate and rank to be resolved sufficiently of doubt. Gloucester's anxiety resembles Othello's in *Oth.* 2.3 and 3.3, and like Othello he jumps too quickly to conclusions. Like Iago, Edmond preys upon this weakness and even proposes eavesdropping (81–3; compare *Oth.* 4.1.81 ff.), although he apparently changes his plan (2.1.20 ff.). Edmond makes his fortune by two letters and is undone by a third (Mack, p. 95; see 3.5.8, 5.1.39).

89 presently immediately.

89 convey carry out.

90 withal therewith.

91 late eclipses A possible allusion to the eclipse of the moon on 27 September and of the sun on 2 October 1605 (see p. 1 above). Eclipses were regarded by superstitious men like Gloucester as auguries of evil, giving warning of such things as the machinations of the Catholic conspirators who intended to blow up king and parliament. The Gunpowder Plot, however, was uncovered in November 1605 – before it could be carried

92–3 Though . . . effects Nature is used in two senses here: (1) human nature, specifically human reason as embodied in natural philosophy, or science; (2) the world of nature, including but not limited to the world of humankind. Thus: human reason can explain these events scientifically, but all nature is afflicted nevertheless by what subsequently happens ('Love cools', etc.).

95 mutinies riots, insurrections.

96–100 This . . . graves On the absence of these lines in Q, see Textual Analysis, p. 278 below.

97–8 son . . . child This recalls Matt. 10.21: 'The brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the sonne, and the children shal rise against their parents, and shal cause them to die.' See also Mark 13.8, 12; Luke 12.52–3, 21.16; Micah 7.6, and compare part 3 of the homily 'Against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion' (Shaheen).

98 bias of nature 'natural course or tendency. A figure from bowling. The *bias* is the curve that the bowl makes in its course' (Kittredge).

99 best . . . time our best years; as at 46.

99 hollowness emptiness, insincerity; as in Kent's reference to Goneril's and Regan's speeches, 1.1.148.

100 disquietly unquietly.

103 honesty 'love of truth, upright conduct' (Schmidt).

EDMOND This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under *Ursa major*, so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising.

Side #7 End here.

Side #8 Start here (Edmond, Edgar)

Enter EDGAR

Pat: he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue

105 surfeits] F; surfeit Q 106 stars] F; the Starres Q 107 on] F; by Q 108 treachers] F; Trecherers Q 108 spherical] F; spirituall Q 108 predominance,] Q; predominance. F 111 whoremaster man] Q; Whore-master-man F 112 on] F; to Q 112 a star!] a Starre, F; Starres: Q 115 I should] F; Fut, I should Q 115 maidenliest] F3; maidenlest Q, F, F2 116 in] F; of Q 116 bastardising.] F; bastardy Q 116 SD] Q2, F; *in margin* Q 117 Pat: he] F; *Edgar*; and out hee Q 117 My cue] F; mine Q

104 excellent (1) supreme, (2) splendid (from Edmond's point of view: Hunter).

104 foppery foolishness.

105 sick in fortune i.e. down on our luck.

105 surfeits excesses.

107 on by; as in *LLL* 1.1.148.

107 heavenly compulsion i.e. astrological influence.

108 treachers traitors.

108 spherical predominance Under the astrological concept of 'planetary influence' (110), if at the time of one's birth a heavenly body was especially powerful because of its ascendant position, one's disposition and destiny were accordingly controlled, or 'enforced'.

109 of to.

110–11 divine thrusting on supernatural imposition.

111 whoremaster lecherous.

111–12 lay . . . charge of impute his lustful tendencies to (Schmidt). To Elizabethans, goats were emblematic of lechery.

113 compounded copulated.

113 Dragon's tail The constellation Draco, an especially malevolent astrological sign.

114 nativity birth.

114 *Ursa major* The constellation Great Bear, or Big Dipper, in which (astrologically) Mars is predominant but shares influence with Venus, making it a malign constellation producing temperaments that are not only daring and impetuous ('rough'), but also lascivious ('lecherous'), as Hunter notes.

115 See collation. The omission of 'Fut' (a variant of the expletive 'foot' = 'Christ's foot') is probably the result of purging away profanity in accordance with the 'Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players' in 1606 (Duthie, p. 170). Taylor concurs and argues for restoration ('Censorship', pp. 78, 109–10).

117 Pat See collation. Because Q crowds *Enter Edgar* into the margin immediately beside 'Edgar' in Edmond's speech, some editors believe the F collator may have become confused and dropped Edmond's summons which, Duthie argues, p. 171, makes 'Pat' pointless. The effect of Edmond's speech, however, does not depend on such a direct summons, and the F reading may stand.

117 catastrophe . . . comedy Early Tudor plays often lacked dramatic motivation; the catastrophe, or concluding episode, often arrived quite arbitrarily to suit the playwright's need to end a play. Armado uses 'catastrophe' in *LLL* 4.1.77 to refer to the concluding episode of an action.

117 cue Edmond deliberately adopts theatrical language in keeping with the role he is about to play. On stage-managing in *King Lear*, see Reibetanz, pp. 57–67.