

King Lear abbreviated

Act 1, Scene 2

Deviousness

Situation: Edmund is the illegitimate and younger son of the earl of Gloucester. Gloucester has an important role in the play. He is a peer and confidant of King Lear. Edmund lets us know of his underhanded plan to turn his father against his older brother, Edgar.

Edmund to himself, No. 1

That which is natural is my goddess
And to that law I'm bound. Why am I less
In the custom of nations that deprives
Me that I lag an elder brother? Why
"Bastard" when my own dimension derives
In shape as true as issues who come by
Honest madams? Why brand they us with "base,"
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature face
A fiercer being than those created
Within a stale, tired bed got between sleep
And wake? Legitimate Edgar, I bid
To have your land. Equal love he doth keep
For his sons, yet this letter could all but
Lead Edmund to top th' legitimate.

The Earl of Gloucester enters.

GLOUCESTER: Kent banished thus? And France in anger parted? All this done on a sudden impulse?
Edmund, how now? What news?

EDMUND: So please your Lordship, none.

He puts a paper in his pocket.

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

EDMUND: It is a letter from my brother that I have not all o'erread; and for much as I have perused, I find it not fit for your o'erlooking.

GLOUCESTER: Give me the letter, sir. Let's see. Let's see.

Edmund give him the paper.

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. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue forever and live the beloved of your brother." Signed, Edgar.