

EDMUND AND EDGAR ESSAY PLAN:

EDMUND:

- In a play focused so intently on issues of nature, civilization, and order, the consequences of Edmund's illegitimacy are profound.
- His serial treachery is not merely self-interested; it is a conscious rebellion against the social order that has denied him the same status as Edgar
- He is a very similar character to Lago in Othello - They are both villains. They both plot the downfall and demise of their foreseeable adversaries with intricate treachery and are both driven by lust for more than one woman
- Edmund's short, sharp sentences are suggestive of his command of circumstances
- Aware of Edgar's virtues, still he has no relenting's, but shrugs his shoulders, and laughs off all compunctions (feelings of guilt)
- He never apologizes for his wickedness; he revels in it.
- He rejects the hierarchy that has made his father and brother so prosperous. But he wants to succeed in society's terms.
- Gloucester Publicly recognizes Edmund to be his child. The act of introducing an illegitimate child to a friend was very rare in the Elizabethan era and shows the great respect Gloucester has for Edmund
- It is fitting that Edmund should be a bastard, for, conceived outside of God's harmonious order with its moral standards, he can deny all vitreous human feelings which are a part of it, proceeding directly from the love of God
- The audience at the time would have responded different to Edmund illegitimacy as it was a sin at that time to commit adultery
- He refers in his soliloquy to the law of primogeniture, and being deprived of any inheritance by being "some twelve or fourteen moonshines *Lag* of a brother". He then says "Why 'bastard'?" "*bastardy*" (adding a syllable to shift the word to a noun) - Edmund may place stress on the second syllable and be referring to the Latin '*tardus*' or English 'tardy' meaning "slow," or "lagging," and so making an indirect punning reference to what he has just said, as well as his illegitimacy. Playing on the idea of "tardiness" therefore emphasises his lagging behind his brother in terms of age and legitimacy
- Edmund refers to "*Fine* word, legitimate", again potentially making a pun as "legitimate" is a word that defines and so "*confines*" and restricts Edmund to his subordinate illegitimate status
- Also in the soliloquy, Edmund refers to Edgar in sarcastic colloquial terms, as "my legitimate," which must surely be a pun on the legal sense of the word as a noun, with some secondary stress derived, forming "legiti-*mate*," meaning "my 'legal' *fellow* or *equal*". Courtly speakers may use "mate" as a colloquial term, as Richard III does in his greeting to the murderers of Clarence. He is saying that he and Edgar are equals in an informal sense as he is an equal partner, being a son of Gloucester too, and so Edgar is his "legitimate". He is attacking again those artificial boundaries and divisions by which society defines his bastardy. Natural law will allow him equal status, he argues. We might also argue that he attacks the patriarchal principle in referring not to his father, but to his mother, by implication in his comparison of himself with "honest madam's issue." All men, he implies, are equal in terms of their birth.

Charlie cooper

- All these rapid punning exploitations allows him to manipulate forms and meanings to his own ends.
- He claims that "Edmund the base Shall to the legitimate" meaning that he will be equal to, and equivalent in status to, his brother ... but only in his own meaning of "legitimate."
- Gloucester's acknowledgement of his illegitimate son is admirable. Although Gloucester has accepted and in his way even loved him, he does not really recognize him as Edgar's equal... Indeed, he calls him "knave" and "whoreson". The comments may be good-natured and not intentionally insulting, the fact that Edmund over hears them in no way mitigates the indignity which Edmund must endure here, and which he has undoubtedly felt for a very long time
- He is known by all to be Gloucester's son and yet is not legally treated as one. (We might also observe that Cornwall and Albany, though not naturally Lear's sons, *are* treated as such, in further mockery of Edmund.)
- He is subversive and is responsible for the deaths of three princesses as well as the cruel maiming of his father.
- He is defeated when Albany and Edgar reassert the values of the old order.
- He is radical in his schemes because he has nothing to lose if he fails, and much to gain if he succeeds
- Edmund pretends that his fake letter is 'nothing, my lord', copying Cordelia's reply.
- When Gloucester blames the sun and moon, Edmund says we should take responsibility because fate had made him the bastard child. He must then take responsibility for his later actions
- Cornwall praises Edmund and says "you shall be ours" and Edmund promises to serve Cornwall. Plot and Subplot become intertwined.
- Alone, Edmund reveals he has sworn his love to both Goneril and Regan and cannot decide between them; he is only loyal to himself. He even calls them "these sisters", to him they're interchangeable.
- He thinks one will have to die for him to 'enjoy' the other and so waits to see what will happen in battle.
- He resolves to kill both Lear and Cordelia if the British win because then he's have power
- When they're captured, he grants them a death warrant
- His progress is halted too late to save Lear.
- Edmund lies dying and confesses his crimes to Edgar who puts aside his disguise. Edmund, determined to do good before he dies, tells them he ordered that Cordelia be hanged. He sends a message to intervene. This is a sense of good not flourishing in time
- Mortally wounded, he sees that both Goneril and Regan have died for him, and whispers, "Yet Edmund was beloved". After this ambiguous statement, he seems to repent his villainy. His peculiar change of heart, rare among Shakespearean villains, is enough to make the audience wonder, amid the carnage, whether Edmund's villainy sprang not from some innate cruelty but simply from a thwarted, misdirected desire for the familial love that he witnessed around him.
- Nahum Tate's 1681 adaption omits the last lines of the soliloquy which says "no gods, stand up for bastards" – Shakespeare's Edmund and Tate's Edmund are slightly different, Shakespeare's Edmund feels the justness of his cause and thus is willing to invoke divine support for it - a support of which Tate's Edmund could not dare to dream.

EDGAR:

- He plays so many roles and performs such a wide range of functions and many may believe he might simply be a plot device. In addition Shakespeare does not spend much time in establishing Edgar's virtues before having him disguise himself.
- He starts the play as a relatively passive character who is easily manipulative but later in the play he shows many acts of heroism.
- As he moves from one disguise and role to another his characterisation progresses and he grows in stature. At the beginning Edgar was 'bookish' and confused but, like the other characters, adversity has strengthened him which is good as at the end there is only him and Albany left to rule England.
- Edgar also comments on Lear and Gloucester's suffering thus guiding audience responses to them.
- Edgar is also actively generous. Edgar, like Cordelia, behaves with Christian virtue. He feels only sympathy for the father who rejected him.
- He may be viewed as the only character unsullied enough to rule after Lear's death. He has committed no crime. He has never questioned the authority of his elders and he took action when necessary
- Is Edgar more sinned against than sinning?
- Poor Tom describes himself as a "fox", "wolf", "dog" and "lion" – animal imagery
- Edgar fakes madness
- Edgar disguises himself as a Bedlam Beggar named Poor Tom – there were many beggars in Elizabethan times due to lots of poverty because of the loss of 'common ground'. Bedlam hospital housed the mentally ill and when inmates were released they were allowed to go begging for survival.
- Edgar's situation now mirrors Lear's – Edgar is reliant on charity and assumed madness When out in the storm as Poor Tom he is an "unaccommodated man"
- He uses third person pronouns ("his pillow", "his own shadow"). The use of the third person heightens the impression of Edgar's feigned madness as Poor Tom, participating in the nonsensical language.
- Edgar accuses Edmund of betraying Albany and challenges Edmund. Edmund agrees to fight and is wounded and killed
- We see both sons have lied; Edmund for his own self gain and Edgar to protect and save Gloucester from hurt during the suicide scene
- Edgar protects his father and challenges, wounds and kills Oswald. Like Kent, Edgar protects someone who has done him wrong
- Perhaps if Edgar had not intercepted and killed Oswald, maybe Goneril would have succeeded at killing Albany
- Edgar speaks the closing lines, Shakespeare's plays usually end with the highest ranking surviving figure saying the last lines and so if it is Edgar (and not Albany who has the highest rank theoretically) then there is a sense that there has been a shift in power and a new future beginning.

EDMUND AND EDGAR TOGETHER:

- Edmund is portrayed as an attractive figure compared to Edgar, particularly in Trevor Nunn's version. It is ironic that Edgar is good, but by being attracted to the evil character, Shakespeare could be revealing that all humans are flawed and we are attracted to those who share our flaws.

CRITICS:

NAHUM TATE in 1681 felt the ending was too gloomy and so devised a happier ending where Lear does not die and there is romance between Edgar and Cordelia

ARNOLD KETTLE – Edmund “is intelligent, active and ruthless. His immediate personal motive is simple” he wants power.

TEXT QUOTES:

- Edgar says there's “reason in madness”
- Edgar says “speak what we feel, not what we ought to say”

CONTEXT:

- 🦋 In Trevor Nunn's production we see Edmund knighted by Cornwall (this doesn't directly happen in the text but it is implied).
- 🦋 Trevor Nunn's version cuts Edgar's line, “the gods are just.”
- 🦋 Shakespeare used of Samuel Harsnett's “***A deceleration of Egreious Popish Impostures***” especially in creating Edgar as Poor Tom as much of Edgar's language mirrors it

- 🦋 Henry VIII had an acknowledged bastard son whom he created earl of Nottingham. No doubt these memorable events would be recalled by a contemporary audience, who recognised that bastardy for those related to the nobility was a flexible, quasi-legal notion.