1.2 Enter Bastard [Edmund, solus, with a letter].

EDMUND
Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound: Wherefore should I
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 asleep and wake? Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father’s love is to the bastard Edmund
As to th’ legitimate. Fine word, “legitimate.”
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top th’ legitimate. I grow, I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards.

1.2 Gloucester’s house 3 Stand . . . custom submit to the affliction of convention (whereby the eldest son inherits everything, and illegitimate sons have no claim on the estate) 4 curiosity (legal) technicalities 5 For that because; moonshines months 6 Lag of younger than 7 compact composed 8 My . . . generous I am as well supplied with intelligence 9 honest chaste (i.e., married) 11 the . . . nature natural lust practiced in secret 12 composition physical excellences; fierce vigorous 14 fops fools, sissors 15 Got begotten 16 land i.e., inheritance 19 speed succeed 20 invention scheme 23 in . . . parted departed in anger 24