

REGAN Lord Edmond spake not with your lord at home?

OSWALD No, madam.

REGAN What might import my sister's letter to him?

OSWALD I know not, lady.

REGAN Faith, he is posted hence on serious matter.

It was great ignorance, Gloucester's eyes being out,

To let him live. Where he arrives he moves

All hearts against us. Edmond, I think, is gone,

In pity of his misery, to dispatch

His 'nighted life, moreover to destroy

The strength o'th'enemy.

OSWALD I must needs after him, madam, with my letter.

REGAN Our troops set forth tomorrow. Stay with us.

The ways are dangerous.

OSWALD I may not, madam.

My lady charged my duty in this business.

REGAN Why should she write to Edmond? Might not you

Transport her purposes by word? Belike –

Some things – I know not what. I'll love thee much:

Let me unseal the letter.

OSWALD Madam, I had rather –

REGAN I know your lady does not love her husband.

I am sure of that; and at her late being here

6 lord] F; Lady Q 6 home?] F; home. Q 8 letter] F; letters Q 13 Edmond] F; and now Q 14–16 In . . . enemy.] F
lineation; two lines divided life, / Moreouer Q 16 o'th'enemy.] F; at'h army. Q; of the Army. Q2 17 madam] F; not in
Q 17 letter] F; letters Q 18 troops set] F; troope sets Q 19–20 I . . . business.] F lineation; as prose Q 21–2 Why . . .
Belike –] As in Q; divided: Edmond? / Might F *22 Belike –] Oxford; belike Q; Belike, F *23 Some things –] Something –
Pope; Some things, F; Some thing, Q; Something Q2 23 much:] Oxford; much, Q; much F 24 I had] F; I'de Q

6–8 Lord . . . him Regan is curious about Edmond's sudden departure and the reason Gonerill so swiftly sent a letter after him.

6 lord See collation. Copy for Q probably had 'L.', which the compositor mistook for an abbreviation of 'Lady' (Duthie, p. 411; Stone, p. 38).

8 import signify.

10 Faith In faith (a common oath).

11–12 It . . . live Compare 3.7.4. Regan initially counselled death, which was practical, but Gonerill's sadism better suited Cornwall's temperament and then excited Regan (King).

11 ignorance folly.

15 'nighted benighted; literally, because he is blind, but Regan may also contemptuously imply the figurative sense.

17 after See collation. 'Madam' was possibly meant to replace rather than follow 'him', but

the correction was misunderstood and the line remained unmetrical (*Textual Companion*, p. 537).

18–19 Stay . . . dangerous Regan's motive in cajoling Oswald is related to her suspicion concerning the relationship between her sister and Edmond. Compare 23–4 and n.

20 charged . . . business i.e. lay particular stress upon me to carry out her orders.

22–3 Belike . . . what Regan is momentarily unsure how to proceed, as her suspicions mount regarding Gonerill and Edmond.

22 Belike Probably.

23–4 I'll . . . letter In the theatre these lines are often accompanied by significant gestures, as Regan attempts to seduce Oswald, caressing – even kissing – him while reaching for the letter he carries on his person (Rosenberg, p. 261).

She gave strange ocelliads and most speaking looks

To noble Edmond. I know you are of her bosom.

OSWALD I, madam?

REGAN I speak in understanding. Y'are, I know't.

Therefore I do advise you take this note:

My lord is dead; Edmond and I have talked;

And more convenient is he for my hand

Than for your lady's. You may gather more.

If you do find him, pray you give him this;

And when your mistress hears thus much from you,

I pray desire her call her wisdom to her.

So, fare you well.

If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor

Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

OSWALD Would I could meet him, madam, I should show

What party I do follow.

REGAN Fare thee well.

Exeunt

4.5 Enter GLOUCESTER and EDGAR [dressed like a peasant]

GLOUCESTER When shall I come to th'top of that same hill?

EDGAR You do climb up it now. Look how we labour.

27 ocelliads] Eliads F; Iliads F2–4; aliads Q; ocelliads *Rome* 29 madam?] F; Madam. Q 30 Y'are] F; for Q *34 lady's] *Rome*; Ladies Q, F 37–8 I . . . well.] F lineation; one line Q 38 fare you well] F; farewell Q *41 him] Q; not in F 41 should show] should shew F; would shew Q 42 party] F; Lady Q 42 SD] F; Exit. Q Act 4, Scene 5 4.5] *Scena Quinta*. F; not in Q 0 SD] *Theobald*; Enter Gloucester, and Edgar. F; Enter Gloster and Edmund. Q 1 I] F; we Q 2 up it now.] F; it vpnow, Q; it vp now, Q2 2 labour.] F; labour? Q

27 ocelliads amorous glances (*OED*, Onions); compare *Wiv.* 1.3.61, and Cotgrave: *Ocelliade*, 'An amorous looke, affectionate winke, wanton aspect, lustfull iert [= jerk], or passionate cast, of the eye; a Sheepes eye'. *OED* and Muir cite Greene, *Disputation between a He and a She Cony-Catcher* (1592); 'amorous glaunces, smirking oeyliads'. Q's 'aliad' involves a/e misreading.

27 speaking looks Muir compares the phrase in Florio's *Montaigne*, iii.211.

28 of her bosom (1) in her confidence, (2) sexually intimate. Compare 5.1.11 n. and R3 1.2.13, Richard III to Lady Anne: 'So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom' (NS; Partridge, p. 77).

30 understanding knowledge (Schmidt).

31 take this note i.e. note this carefully.

32 talked i.e. come to an understanding (*Kittredge*).

33 convenient suitable, fitting.

34 You . . . more You may infer more from what I have said.

35 give him this Precisely what Regan gives Oswald for Edmond is not clear. It may be a ring or other token rather than a note, since Edgar reads only one letter after rifling Oswald's pockets (4.5.250–8). Compare Furness, Muir, Hunter.

36 thus much i.e. what I have told you.

37 I pray . . . to her Compare *Wiv.* 3.3.118. The image is the summoning of a subordinate. The repetition of 'her' propels the irony of this line into sarcasm, which Regan hardly expects Oswald to repeat (King).

Act 4, Scene 5

0 SD *dressed like a peasant* The Old Man in 4.1 has apparently kept his word and given Edgar new apparel. See 4.1.50 and 222 below.

1 that same hill Compare 4.1.68–70.

2 You . . . labour Edgar's deception throughout this scene may seem cruel, his explanation and

Side #17 Start here
(Gloucester, Edgar)

GLOUCESTER Methinks the ground is even.

EDGAR Horrible steep.

Hark, do you hear the sea?

GLOUCESTER No, truly.

EDGAR Why, then your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish. 5

GLOUCESTER So may it be indeed.

Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st

In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

EDGAR Y'are much deceived. In nothing am I changed
But in my garments.

GLOUCESTER Methinks y'are better spoken. 10

EDGAR Come on, sir, here's the place. Stand still. How fearful

And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low.

The crows and choughs that wing the midway air

Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down 15

Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!

Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.

The fishermen that walk upon the beach

Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque

Diminished to her cock; her cock, a buoy

Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge, 20

That on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes,

Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,

3–4 Horrible . . . sea? F lineation; one line Q 7 speak'st F; speakest Q 8 In F; With Q 11 Come . . . fearful] *As in* Q; two lines divided Sir, / Heere's F 14 Show] Shew Q, F *17 walk] Q; walk'd F *18 yon] Q; yond F 21 th'] F; the Q 21 pebble] F; pebble Q 21 chafes] F; chaffes Q 22 so] F; its so Q

defence at 33–4 notwithstanding. Especially cruel is the attempt to rob Gloucester of confidence in the senses he still retains.

6 anguish extreme pain; this may include both physical and mental pain. Compare Florio's *Montaigne*, iv.70: 'Our senses are not onely altered, but many times dulled, by the passions of the mind' (Muir).

7–8 Methinks . . . didst Gloucester's observation is accurate. Edgar has dropped mad Tom's idiom and manner, and his tone of voice is accordingly different. He now speaks in blank verse.

11–24 How . . . headlong Muir again compares Florio's *Montaigne*, iv.67–8, on the effect of dizzying heights. The details of the description, which Addison admired and to which Dr Johnson objected, are precisely what make the passage moving and persuasive, particularly to eyeless Gloucester. See Furness.

13 choughs jackdaws, or possibly the Cornish chough or red-legged crow (Onions, cited by NS; pronounced 'chuffs'). Compare 'russet-pated choughs', *MND* 3.2.21.

14 gross large.

15 samphire St Peter's herb, or *herbe de Saint Pierre*, an aromatic plant growing along sea-cliffs, used in pickling and gathered by men suspended by ropes.

18 yon See collation. Again at 114 and 145, F has 'yond' for Q's 'yon', a recurrent Folio mannerism that apparently reflects its modernising tendency rather than a concern for accuracy (Hunter).

19 cock A small ship's-boat, cockboat.

21 unnumbered innumerable.

21 idle useless, barren.

21 pebble Collective plural.

Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight

Topple down headlong.

GLOUCESTER Set me where you stand.

EDGAR Give me your hand. You are now within a foot 25

Of th'extreme verge. For all beneath the moon

Would I not leap upright.

GLOUCESTER Let go my hand.

Here, friend, 's another purse: in it, a jewel

Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods

Prosper it with thee. Go thou further off. 30

Bid me farewell, and let me hear thee going.

EDGAR Now fare ye well, good sir.

GLOUCESTER With all my heart.

EDGAR [*Aside*] Why I do trifle thus with his despair

Is done to cure it.

GLOUCESTER [*Kneels*] O you mighty gods!

This world I do renounce, and in your sights 35

Shake patiently my great affliction off.

If I could bear it longer and not fall

To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,

My snuff and loathed part of nature should

Burn itself out. If Edgar live, O bless him. 40

Now, fellow, fare thee well.

EDGAR Gone, sir; farewell.

[*Gloucester throws himself forward and falls*]

25–7 Give . . . upright.] *As in* Q; lines end . . . hand: / . . . Verge: / . . . vpright. F 30 further] F; farther Q 32 ye] F; you Q 33 SD] *Capell*; not in Q, F 33–4 Why . . . it.] F lineation; one line (turned over) Q 34 Is] F, Q; tis Q2 *34 SD] *He kneels*. Q (after Gods.); not in F 39 snuff] F; snuff Q 40 him] F; not in Q 41–8 Gone . . . sir?] F lineation; as prose Q 41 SD] *Capell*; *He falls*. Q (after thee well); not in F

23 turn spin, become giddy.

23 deficient failing, defective.

24 Topple i.e. topple me.

27 leap upright Having been pulled along, wearily climbing the 'hill' (1–2), Gloucester is in a crouching position. Edgar warns that to straighten or jump up suddenly could result in loss of balance and prove fatal.

28 another purse Compare 4.1.59, 72.

29–30 Fairies . . . thee Gloucester alludes to the superstition that fairies who guard hidden treasure can make it multiply miraculously in the possession of the discoverer (Kittredge). Compare *WT* 3.3.123.

36 patiently Gloucester, of course, is anything

but 'patient'. Compare 38 n., and p. 21 above.

38 opposeless Unaware of his futility as well as inconsistency, Gloucester opposes ('quarrels with') the gods by attempting suicide while at the same time asserting that their wills cannot be resisted (opposed).

39 snuff candle-end or smouldering wick.

39 loathed . . . nature the fag end of life, characterised by senility and therefore disgusting.

40 Burn itself out i.e. end naturally.

41 SD *Gloucester* . . . *falls* Gloucester doubtless waits till he hears Edgar say he is gone before he throws himself forward. Q places the SD *He falls* after Gloucester's speech, where there is ample space, rather than in the midst of Edgar's speech. Why F

[*Aside*] And yet I know not how conceit may rob
 The treasury of life, when life itself
 Yields to the theft. Had he been where he thought,
 By this had thought been past. – Alive or dead? 45
 Ho, you sir, friend! Hear you, sir? Speak!
 [*Aside*] Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives. –
 What are you, sir?

GLOUCESTER Away, and let me die.

EDGAR Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
 So many fathom down precipitating, 50
 Thou'dst shivered like an egg. But thou dost breathe,
 Hast heavy substance, bleed'st not, speak'st, art sound.
 Ten masts at each make not the altitude
 Which thou hast perpendicularly fell.
 Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again. 55

GLOUCESTER But have I fall'n or no?

EDGAR From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.
 Look up a-height: the shrill-gorged lark so far
 Cannot be seen or heard; do but look up.

42 SD] *Capell*; not in Q, F 42 may] F; my Q 45 had thought] F, Q; thought had Q2 45 past. –] *Theobald*; past, Q; past, F *46 Ho . . . Speak! This *edn*; Hoa, you Sir: Friend, heare you Sir, speake: F; ho you sir, heare you sir, speak Q 47 SD] *Capell*; not in Q, F 49 Hadst . . . air,] *As in Q*; two lines divided ought / But F 49 gossamer] gosmore Q; Gozemore F; goss'mer *Pope* 50 So . . . precipitating,] Q; (So . . . precipitating) F 51 Thou'dst] F; Thou hadst Q 52 speak'st] F; speake Q 56 fall'n] *falne* F; fallen Q 56 no?] F; no I Q 57 summit] *Somnet* F; *sommons* Q; *summons* Q2 *58 a-height] *Warburton*; a hight Q; a height F 59 up.] F; vp? Q

lacks the SD is unclear, unless Compositor B simply overlooked it. On staging-techniques, see Bratton, pp. 175–7; Derek Peat, 'King Lear and the tension of uncertainty', *S.Sur.* 33 (1980), 46–9; and p. 22 above.

42–4 And yet . . . theft Edgar takes a calculated risk: the illusion ('conceit') of a death leap may have the same effect as the reality, especially when death is willed. But see W. Schleiner's discussion of 'cure by imagination' in *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance*, Wiesbaden, 1991, pp. 274–86.

43 treasury treasure; as in 2*H6* 1.3.131.

45–6 Alive . . . Speak Edgar changes his tone of voice to suggest still another character as he moves into the next phase of ministering to Gloucester, who has apparently fainted but may appear to be dead.

47 pass die.

49 gossamer Disyllabic; compare Q, F spellings in collation.

50 fathom Plural.

53 at each i.e. end to end, one on top of the other. Stone conjectures that 'alenth' (= 'alength') stood in the copy, and Oxford adopts 'a-length'. But none of the early quartos and Folios emend, so the expression was probably understood as it stands.

55 Thy . . . miracle The theme of Edgar's ministrations to his father; compare 72–7.

57 summit F 'Somnet', a variant but erroneous spelling of 'summit' (*OED*), probably derives from Shakespeare's hand: see Duthie, p. 412.

57 bourn boundary; i.e. cliff bordering on the sea.

58 a-height on high; compare *R3* 4.4.86: 'One heaued a high, to be hurld downe belowe' (*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works (Original-Spelling Edition)*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 1986).

58 shrill-gorged shrilly voiced.

GLOUCESTER Alack, I have no eyes. 60
 Is wretchedness deprived that benefit
 To end itself by death? 'Twas yet some comfort
 When misery could beguile the tyrant's rage
 And frustrate his proud will.

EDGAR Give me your arm.
 Up; so. How is't? Feel you your legs? You stand. 65

GLOUCESTER Too well, too well.

EDGAR This is above all strangeness.
 Upon the crown o'th'cliff what thing was that
 Which parted from you?

GLOUCESTER A poor unfortunate beggar.

EDGAR As I stood here below, methought his eyes
 Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses, 70
 Horns whelked and waved like the enragèd sea.
 It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee.

GLOUCESTER I do remember now. Henceforth I'll bear
 Affliction till it do cry out itself
 'Enough, enough', and die. That thing you speak of,
 I took it for a man. Often 'twould say
 'The fiend, the fiend!' He led me to that place. 75

EDGAR Bear free and patient thoughts.

Side #17 End here.

*63 tyrant's] tyrants Q; Tyrans F 65 is't?] F; not in Q *66 strangeness.] *strangenes* Q; *strangenesse* Q2; *strangenesse*, F *67 o'th'cliff what] of the cliffe what Q; o'th'Cliffe. What F 68 beggar] F; bagger Q 69 methought] F; me thoughts Q 70 He] F; a Q 71 whelked] *Hammer (subst.)*; welk't Q; welkt Q2; wealk'd F 71 enragèd] F; enridged Q 73 make them] F; made their Q 78 'twould] F; would it Q; would he Q2 79 fiend!] fiend, Q; Fiend, F 80 Bear] F; Bare Q

63 beguile deceive, cheat.

63 tyrant's rage Gloucester alludes to the traditional defence of suicide among the Romans, particularly the Stoics under emperors like Nero or Domitian (Hunter).

69–72 Compare *Ham.* 1.4.69–78: Horatio warns Hamlet that a demon might drive him to insanity and to suicide by jumping off a cliff (Kittredge).

71 whelked convoluted, twisted.

71 enragèd Although most editors prefer Q's 'enridged' and regard F's 'enragèd' as a 'vulgarisation' (Hunter; compare Duthie, p. 182), F is acceptable. Moreover, Shakespeare describes the 'enragèd' sea many times elsewhere and could as easily be responsible for F's adjective as Q's (*Textual Companion*, p. 537).

72 father i.e. old man.

73 clearest brightest, purest, most glorious (Schmidt; cited by Furness, Muir).

73–4 who . . . impossibilities i.e. who acquire honour and reverence by performing miracles. Compare Luke 18.27: 'The things which are vnpossible with me[n], are possible with God' (Furness; Shaheen cites Matt. 19.26 as well). Compare also 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity' (Kittredge; Tilley M471).

75 I . . . now It is not clear what Gloucester refers to – the patience he earlier rejected (35–40), or Tom o'Bedlam.

75–7 Henceforth . . . die i.e. from now on I shall bear affliction patiently until it wearies itself out and stops.

80 free not guilty or troubled.