The Problem of Love and Codes of Conduct for the Younger Courtiers in King Lear

Debora L. Pfeiffer

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The Problem of Love and Codes of Conduct
for the Younger Courtiers in King Lear

(TITLE)

BY
Debora L. Pfeiffer

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The Problem of Love and Codes of Conduct for the Younger Courtiers in *King Lear*

Debora Pfeiffer

April 25, 2015
DEDICATION

To B.C. and N.M.
Grazie di cuore, Signori.

To D.E.
Geachte heer, U bent van harte bedankt.

To W.S and M.C.
“...within this wall of flesh
There is a soul counts thee her creditor
And with advantage means to pay thy love…”

--King John (3.3.22-24)
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Abstract

The courtiers Edmund and Edgar are critical to the action of King Lear, yet there has been little scholarship which has treated these characters in depth. I argue that one way to comprehend them and their significance in the play’s action is to analyze their behavior according to the standards of the Renaissance conduct books that were circulating in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century when the play was written. Baldassare Castigligone's The Book of the Courtier, Niccolo Machiavelli's The Prince, and Desiderius Erasmus's The Education of a Christian Prince each sheds light on important themes in Renaissance courtiership and statecraft from three different world views. Though the brothers’ applications of these theories is different and their goals vary, Edmund and Edgar both exhibit in their speech and behavior counsel from all three conduct books at various points in the play. My study aims to promote a greater understanding of these characters and foreground their importance to the play and its themes for the casual reader, the scholar, and the playgoer, as well as the director of the play.
The Problem of Love and Codes of Conduct for the Younger Courtiers in *King Lear*
Chapter One: Prescriptions of Conduct in the Renaissance: the Ideal and the Real

King Lear's courtiers have received relatively little critical attention, which is surprising, because the play provides a brilliant and detailed study of numerous facets of Renaissance courtiership at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Most of the criticism of the play has centered on the character of Lear himself. Scholars should be interested in these supporting characters, however, because courtiers in King Lear create the court, which is the foundation of the nation. Courtiers also enforce the king's decrees; without them, the king would have no power. Shakespeare appears to have been so convinced that courtiers were important that he added more of them to the story of King Leir (his chief source for the play) by borrowing a section from a tale from Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia to create the Gloucester/Edmund/Edgar subplot. In this thesis, I will analyze the courtiers Edgar and Edmund in the context of the other courtiers, in order to show that these two are a different breed. I will demonstrate that they represent the Early Modern courtier, who, because of the breadth and depth of his physical and intellectual development, his study of humanist teachings, and his ability to manipulate language, is far more powerful and effective than any of the other courtiers in the play.

The status of the courtier in King Lear becomes evident in the very first scene of the play. Here, two of the most important courtiers in Lear's kingdom, the Earl of Kent and the Earl of Gloucester, discuss the fact that they do not know who will be appointed king of England. They assume that it will either be the Duke of Cornwall or the Duke of Albany, but they are not sure which one the king favors. The opening scene makes it clear that succession is the most important matter in the hierarchy of the king's responsibilities and concerns. From this conversation, the audience learns that Kent and
Gloucester have both been excluded from any discussion of this momentous decision. This is an indication that Lear has not been in the habit of accepting counsel from his courtiers, a practice that indicates serious problems in the operation of his reign.

The issue of courtiership was particularly fraught under the leadership of James I who assumed the title of King of England and Ireland in 1603. James was convinced that he had the right to make decisions without consulting his advisors. The opening sonnet of the *Basilikon Doron* states James’s position very clearly:

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GOD giues not Kings the stile of Gods in vaine,
For on his Throne his Sce pter doe they swey:
And as their subjects ought them to obey,
So Kings should feare and serue their God againe
If then ye would enjo y a happie raigne,
Obserue the Statutes of your heauenly King,
And from his Law, make all your Lawes to spring:
Since his Lieutenant here ye should remain,
Reward the iust, be stedfast, true, and plaine,
Reppresse the proud, maintayning aye the right,
Walke alwayes so, as euer in his sight,
Who guardes the godly, plaguing the prophane:
And so ye shall in Princely vertues shine,
Resembling right your mightie King Diuine. (James I n.p.)
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James thus expresses the belief that the king was the representative of God on earth in his assertion that the monarch “his (God’s) Scepter” sways on the throne. The king’s word was infallible, and he was therefore in no need of advice from those around him. James’s stance was that the king was the father and that all of his subjects were his children; any advice or counsel offered by children would have been rendered inappropriate and would have been considered superfluous by the monarch, who resembled “the mightie King Divine.”
In *King Lear*, which was first performed on December 26, 1606, after James had been in power for almost three years, Shakespeare shows how dangerous and destructive this approach can be. The first scene of the play reveals that Lear, having failed to consult any court advisor, has decided to divide the kingdom among his daughters, the greatest portion to be bestowed on the one who expresses the most love for him.

Tell me, my daughters
(Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,)
Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. (1. 1. 48-52)

In the quotation above, we are presented with an example of one of the chief problems with the concept of the divine right of kings; this monarch has decided on his own to separate the country into three parts, thus weakening the national forces and creating a situation which fosters both domestic and civil strife. The kingdom is also left with a fragmented culture and a vulnerability to foreign invasion.

What is perhaps most alarming regarding this scenario is Lear’s notion to bestow the largest portion of land upon the daughter who declares that she loves him most. His concept expresses an appalling lack of maturity on the part of the monarch as a parent. What is more important to my argument is that it also signals two other conditions: that Lear considers his daughters viable members of the court, who are worthy of receiving power and favors, and that he has long been in the habit of rewarding the flattery of court members. The fact that Lear does not consult with his oldest and most trusted courtiers in the creation of this plan
implies that any courtier who would offer an opinion other than the king’s or who would dare to challenge his decisions would not be thanked and may even find himself or herself punished for such an action.

The characters at court who are closest to Lear, his favorite daughter Cordelia and the fervently loyal courtier, Kent, appear to be aware of the monarch’s tendency to allow flattery to influence his decisions. The forceful expressions of both of these characters in the face of Lear’s folly are an indication of the established nature of his practices. Kent’s and Cordelia’s speeches highlight the sense of urgency each of the characters feels to arrest Lear in his downward spiral as a father and as a king. The statements of both Cordelia and Kent also display the commitment each of these characters feels toward Lear and toward the nation. Aware as they are of the breach of courtesy they are performing, they each make an heroic effort to bring the deluded Lear to his senses. When Cordelia and Kent are summarily banished for contesting Lear’s method and decrees, the kingdom declines rapidly. The rest of the play can be seen as a chronicle of Lear’s education in the error of his ways.

Another of the courtier’s roles in statecraft is so obvious that it is easily overlooked: the king needed courtiers around him to protect his person and to provide him with companionship, as well as physical and moral support. In *King Lear*, this concept becomes apparent in the third scene of the first act, when Goneril instructs Oswald to show disrespect toward Lear and his knights. As the court members of a higher level are absent, it falls to the knights to speak up in defense of the dignity and well-being of the king:
My lord, I know not what the matter is; but to my judgment your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also and your daughter. (1.4.49-53)

Shortly hereafter, Lear summons Goneril's steward, Oswald, and asks the steward if he is aware of Lear's station:

Lear: Who am I, sir?
Oswald: My lady's father.
Lear: 'My lady's father'? My lord's knave! You whoreson dog! you slave! you cur!
Oswald: I am none of these, my lord; I beseech your pardon.
Lear: Do you bandy looks with me, you rascal?
[Strikes him.]
Oswald: I'll not be strucken, my lord. (1.4.68-74)

This scene shows that Lear, as “my lady’s father,” has been reduced to the position of defending his own status and his own personal well-being. It is only through the intervention of the disguised courtier, Kent, who pushes Oswald away, that this altercation between Lear and Oswald is halted. The Fool’s entrance at this point in the scene signals Kent’s folly. Always one step ahead in his thinking, he offers Kent his coxcomb, indicating both the futility and danger of challenging the host family’s servants. This action displays that the system for Lear’s protection has been broken down and that no heartfelt and courageous attempt on Kent’s part is able to salvage it.

Kent is not the only courtier who places himself in mortal peril in order to shield Lear from the inimical elements that surround him. Gloucester, too, risks life, limb, and livelihood to bring Lear to shelter during the storm. The disguised Edgar also makes an effort to humor Lear and to stay with the king as long as he can. Even the Fool endeavors to assist the king by providing Lear with veiled
insights into the error of his ways. However, the courtier who sacrifices all to comfort and protect Lear is Cordelia. It is she who provides him directly and succinctly with the assurance of her unconditional love and devotion; she also arranges for the medical attention that his weakened mental and physical state demands.

The relationship of all these courtiers to Lear provides the foundation of nationhood, which can be defined as the commitment to king and country through the expression of complete and often inconvenient truth as well as a dedication which knows no bounds. Thus the entire play can be viewed as an argument for the value of the courtier to the king and to the state, for Lear shows that when he casts off the courtiers who sustain him with love, good counsel, and protection, he removes the supporting structure not only of his personal life and the station of the monarch but also that of the national government as well. In fact, far from serving merely on the periphery of the government, the play shows that the courtiers themselves could serve as the monarch in the absence of an heir. Certainly King Lear illustrates that, in the turbulent environment of Renaissance England, the fact that one has offspring and has made arrangements for succession does not mean that the plans will be executed without unexpected obstacles.

Given the significance of the courtiers, their individual qualities were extremely important. King Lear boasts the most fantastic range in this character: the ardently loyal Medieval version, such as Kent and Gloucester; the cynical, independent, self-interested type, such as Cornwall; the courtier characterized by
spiritual purity and divine kindness, Cordelia; and the unsung hero, the Fool, whose innate wisdom and insights cannot be recognized by the king. However, by far, the most highly developed, complex, and promising courtiers are Edmund and Edgar. In this thesis, I argue that these two sons of Gloucester embody Shakespeare’s version of a radically new kind of Early Modern courtier. In contrast to Kent’s and Gloucester’s Medieval style of courtier, Edmund and Edgar prove that they can think, reason, strategize, and exploit opportunities. They are able to boldly take initiative, responding to situations as they occur. They are able to assess the character of others and can manipulate others through rhetoric to achieve desired ends. Unlike Kent and Gloucester, Edmund and Edgar are able to accurately appraise events, behave with autonomy, and devote themselves to the achievement of political goals. While Cornwall and Cordelia represent the two poles of ethical behavior in the courtier, the actions of Edmund and Edgar situate them somewhere in the middle of the span between utter purity and complete amorality and wickedness.

I argue that that by looking at Edmund and Edgar through the lens of the conduct books written by Castiglione, Erasmus, and Machiavelli, the scholar can see quite clearly the conflicting value systems in which the Renaissance courtier functioned. I have chosen these three works because each one provides a particular aspect of the rules and tools needed for the creation of the Early Modern courtier. In my work, I point out ways in which the courtiers follow the precepts offered in these books, but I also discuss ways in which they reject them.
All three of the conduct books address significant aspects of the character of the courtier which are found in the play: Castiglione is concerned with rhetoric and the persuasion of those in power, and with the part disguise plays in the course of the action, Erasmus is preoccupied with the moral stance of the prince and the well-being of the nation, and Machiavelli focuses on the monarch’s single-minded approach to gaining and maintaining the position of power. Evidence of all three of these philosophies is found in the behavior of Edmund and Edgar, and the combination of the three methods makes up the totality of the strategies of each of these Early Modern courtiers. While all three theories are important to the brothers at different times, over the course of the play, Edmund appears to move from a Machiavellian view to an Erasmian outlook, while Edgar begins with an Erasmian standpoint and gradually but steadily adopts a Machiavellian stance.

Furthermore, in my thesis, I reveal ways in which the conduct books fail to provide a compass for these two courtiers in navigating the waters in their turbulent world. Edmund and Edgar compensate for these omissions by creating solutions as they go along. For example, Edmund’s social disadvantages are never addressed in any of the conduct material. Edmund, who quickly learns that his prospects for promotion at court are limited because of his status as an illegitimate second son, concocts a plan to take over his father’s title through the creation of a fictitious story about Edgar. Edmund advances his career even more rapidly by implicating Gloucester in a treasonous plot against Cornwall’s administration. He also accelerates his rise to power through his close association with both Regan and Goneril. Edgar, for his part, also makes some decisions which are not even remotely suggested in the conduct books: he assumes the roles of a
filthy madman and a humble laborer. While attempting to maneuver his way back into his rightful position in society, he provides comfort and instruction to the ailing king and he also takes the protective paternal role with his disabled father. The conduct books never address responsibilities such as these, nor do they provide counsel on the matter of protocol when two brothers duel for the right to rule the kingdom.

What the conduct books do provide are general recommendations to promote success for the courtier and the prince, and these provide quite useful tools in interpreting the behavior of court members in *King Lear*. The first of the conduct books, *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) by Baldassare Castiglione, addresses the influence and power paradigm from the courtier’s point of view; it holds that the major purpose of the courtier’s role is to develop a close relationship with the prince and to provide him with good counsel. This idea is particularly appropriate for *King Lear* because one of the chief problems in the play is that Lear refuses to accept counsel from his courtiers. Castiglione provides detailed information regarding the dress, manners, and cultivation of the courtier. He stresses the courtier’s intellectual, physical and social development; he holds that the courtier must create a persona which is pleasing and charismatic so that he is likely to be granted the closest access to the prince and can therefore influence that prince to rule better. The theme of the assumption of a persona is a thread which runs throughout the fabric of the play; Edmund and Edgar both constantly take on various roles in order to accomplish their chosen ends. Practical matters and principles of state administration are not mentioned at all in Castiglione’s work, for this author’s only purpose is to instruct the courtier in the construction of a character of refinement, cultivation, and ease at all times. The implication here is that the courtier must
consistently and continually hide his emotional life from the world. Through the course of the action, both Edmund and Edgar reveal the strain of this concealment of emotions, and ultimately the impossibility of maintaining the false identities for an indefinite period of time.

There is no existing criticism relating Castiglione’s concepts to the courtiers in King Lear. The criticism which involves Castiglione’s influence on other Shakespearean courtiers generally centers on the appearance and refined manners of the courtier. Philip Collington, in his work regarding Much Ado About Nothing, Viviana Commensoli in her commentary on Othello, Thomas Honegger’s treatment of Romeo and Juliet and Barbara Johnson’s assessment of Hamlet are examples of this type of criticism. C.L. Gent focuses on the spiritual themes of the fourth book of Castiglione’s work, tracing them through the subtext of Measure for Measure.

The Education of a Christian Prince (1516) by Desiderius Erasmus is the second conduct book I use in my study. It describes the careful steps to be taken by the educators of the future prince, but it also outlines in detail the moral qualities that the monarch must possess as well as the deep level of care and concern he must show for his country and his subjects. This work is of particular interest in my investigation of the characters of Edmund and Edgar, because the struggle for survival of each of these characters is so intense that the consideration of ethical standards and the well-being of the nation can hardly be considered by either one of them. While Erasmus’s ideas form a significant part of Early Modern thought and culture, in King Lear, the playwright seems to be arguing that the ideas presented by Erasmus regarding the conduct of the monarch are so
idealistic that their consistent application to actual life situations (without the use of other techniques) appears impossible.

Erasmian criticism of Shakespeare’s courtiers has centered primarily on *In Praise of Folly*. However, there are still a number of critical works which use *The Education of a Christian Prince* as their basis. Marcella Quadri, Robin Headlam Wells, and R.V. Young all discuss the strong Christian themes and the nature of the kingship in relation to *Henry V*. Thomas Moretti uses Erasmus’s standards to assess *Henry VI Part 3* in terms of the possibility of a truly Christian rule. Steven Marx writes about the Erasmian and humanist influences in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, especially regarding the subject of war.

Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1532), the third courtesy book to which I refer, offers counsel to the prince from the standpoint of *Realpolitik* and is particularly useful for helping us understand the new statecraft being scrutinized in *King Lear*. Machiavelli holds that the waging of war is the chief occupation of the prince. He argues that while it is commendable for the prince to respect moral laws, the actual practice of ruling a kingdom requires that the prince only appear to be good. Machiavelli’s prince is interested in the subjects of his kingdom merely in regard to their obedience, and by extension, to the prince’s personal safety. The finer points of state management, such as domestic welfare, are of no importance to him, as his only concern is the expansion of his territory through military force. This philosophy is very much in evidence in Edmund’s rise to power; after he decides that he will seize Edgar’s land and title, his actions follow Machiavelli’s recommendations quite closely. Edgar, too, is obliged to employ Machiavelli’s tactics not only to see that justice is served, but also merely to survive. As effective as the employment of Machiavelli’s tactics seem in the short run, the action of
*King Lear* demonstrates that no prince and no courtier can live for political advancement alone and deny their personal feelings, as Machiavelli’s teachings imply. In fact, at many critical moments, Lear and nearly all the courtiers in the play act upon their emotions, and not with the calculation and rationality which Machiavelli recommends. I will examine the recommendations of each of the three conduct books much more closely in chapter two, and in chapters three and four of my thesis, I will apply the details of these books to the behavior of Edmund and Edgar.

Numerous scholarly articles have been written regarding the connections between Shakespeare’s plays and Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, but no scholarly work has been done on *King Lear’s* courtiers in relation to this work. Arlene Oseman concentrates particularly on Prospero’s unpunished abuse of power, and the manner in which he is modeled after Machiavelli’s prince. Barbara Riebling argues that Macbeth acts emotionally and impulsively, thus breaking Machiavelli’s rules regarding the strategic uses of evil and cruelty in his teachings. Cajsa Baldini writes about *Richard II*, suggesting that his resistance to adopt the rules set forth in *The Prince* contributes to the failure of his regime. Robin Headlam Wells, using *Julius Caesar*, argues that Shakespeare and Machiavelli both believed that because human nature does not change, patterns from military and political history are the perfect models on which to shape policy. Avery Plaw posits that Shakespeare shows through the adolescence and maturation of Henry V that Machiavelli’s *virtu* can be established in the political arena, though he argues that a complete application of all Machiavelli’s rules is psychologically impossible.

These three conduct books reveal much about the two brothers and their trajectory in the play and through the analysis of the counsel they contain. Through the use of these
works, I hope to provide the reader with an overview of the conflicting influences that the courtier and the prince might have experienced at the outset of the Early Modern period. I believe that my study is particularly important when seen in the context of previous scholarship because there have been no studies done which focus on the behavior of Edmund and Edgar using any of the three the conduct books which I employ. I believe that my research is also important because my discussion shows that the advice stated in each of the three conduct books shows that the instruction in one book radically conflicts with the advice given in the other two books. The situations in which Edmund and Edgar find themselves also illustrate the impossibility of the application of many of the principles in these books and even the absurdity of some of the advice offered by the authors.

Another factor that supports the significance of my research is that though scholars have written about Edgar and Edmund separately, no one has written about them together in any great depth as a study in contrasts and in similarities. Both characters operate in ways that express their respective familial and social situations, so the meaning of the play cannot be reduced to a discussion of good versus evil. Both brothers show signs of strong ambition, both show affection for family members, and both engage in dissembling, deception, and criminal activity on the path to the achievement of their respective goals. The examination of the trajectory of their paths in one work will surely shed light on the concerns and aspirations of all Renaissance courtiers represented in literature at this time.

What I hope to prove is that the play shows the difficult and messy struggle of the monarch, the court, and the courtier who are emerging from the Middle Ages into the
world of the Early Modern. I also plan to show how looking at the courtiers in this way assists the reader, the stage director, and the audience in their understanding of the play’s outcome. Many critics and scholars have complained that the ending of the play is unsatisfactory, but that is because their focus has been entirely upon Lear. The illustrious eighteenth century scholar and critic, Charles Lamb, argued that *King Lear* could not be adequately staged (Lamb n.p.). In his book, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, the twentieth century theatre critic, Jan Kott, posits that the play “...gives one the impression of a high mountain that everyone admires, yet no one particularly wishes to climb” (Kott 127-128). More recently, Harold Bloom asserted that he has never seen a satisfactory production of the play (Bloom 484). I argue that, while *King Lear* has its difficulties, by paying a great deal of attention to the construction of the characters of Edmund and Edgar, a thoughtful and knowledgeable stage director can create a drama which will move the contemporary audience. By highlighting the course of action of the two brothers, the audience can see that Edmund and Edgar’s power waxes as Lear’s (and Gloucester’s) wanes. I will also show the reasons that, while the brothers seem equally matched in intelligence, social skills, and strength, Edgar’s strategy succeeds while Edmund’s ultimately fails.

Edmund, following Machiavelli’s precepts, attempts to jettison the status quo. Throughout most of the play, he does not display emotional attachment for the king, the royal family, or for his own family. He evidently intends, with either Regan or Goneril, to start from the ground up with his own rule. He has come up through the ranks in a more expected way, through the court system: by using rhetoric to form alliances with courtiers of a higher rank, which enables him to acquire more and more power. Edmund’s
weakness is that he has an emotional axe to grind; though he has been born noble, his illegitimacy diminishes his status. The governmental and societal structure has not preferred him and he has vowed to settle that score. His father has also inferred that Edmund is less loved and respected than his older, legitimate brother. This emotional wound leads him to make a faulty judgment at a critical moment, which precipitates his demise.

Edgar’s rise to power is based on an entirely different set of assumptions. As the lawful heir of Gloucester, he has always been entitled to land, fortune, and privilege. The social structure has set up a straight course for him to power and prosperity. Unlike Edmund, he manages to maneuver himself into an advantageous position outside the court; he only uses one court member, Albany, to assist him at the final stage of his ascent to the kingship. Though Edgar employs certain aspects of Machiavelli’s prescribed methods, he clearly rejects others. For example, Edgar obviously reveres Lear, and he allows himself to feel and express grief at the king’s misfortune. Machiavelli states that when friends and family members form a hindrance to the ascent to power, that they should be eliminated, but Edgar defies this dictum by making every attempt to preserve the lives of both Lear and Gloucester.

I argue that for these two reasons and for many others which I will explain in subsequent chapters, of these two bold, resourceful, shrewd, and articulate noblemen, Edgar is the one who triumphs. I posit that the reason for this is partly because he believes that he is reclaiming the superior rank and privilege which belongs to him, but mostly because he creates in himself a version of Early Modern man which utilizes some of the suggestions, but also surpasses all the combined counsel of the three conduct
books. Not content to rely on the established methods and manners of court, Edgar shows himself to be knowledgeable, adept, and capable in every situation in the context of the empire in its entirety.

I will use the second chapter of this work as a platform for a summary of the social, historical, and economic conditions of Renaissance England. I will discuss the reason that the conduct books were created and how the information they contained was interpreted and applied by readers. I will then provide a brief history of the creation of each of the three conduct books as well as information concerning their reception by the reading public as well. In addition to these points, I will also present a description of the changing profile of the courtier and the way in which *King Lear*’s court members conform to the various models detailed in the literature. Chapters three and four will provide a study of Edmund and Edgar respectively. I will analyze each of their methods in their ascent to power, relating these methods to the prescriptions provided in the conduct books. In chapter five I will explain how the information in the conduct books can be used to enhance the production of *King Lear*. I will provide biographical information (including social and cultural influences) for Edmund and Edgar, as well as directorial notes. I will give suggestions regarding the play’s opening which foregrounds the similarities and differences of the brothers and anticipates the ways in which they will apply the counsel provided in the conduct books. In addition, I will also supply directorial suggestions which accompany a close reading of the final scene. In so doing, I intend to support the concept that the playwright’s choice of Edgar is not only a thoughtful one, but that it provides a ray of hope for England and for the audience at the very end of the play.
Chapter Two: Conduct Books in Renaissance England and the Failed Courtiers in King Lear

Introduction to Chapter Two

In this chapter, I will set the stage for the discussion of Edmund and Edgar as the best examples in King Lear of the Early Modern courtier by treating different aspects of the subject in four separate sections. In the first section of this chapter, I will describe the way that the nature of the court was shifting at the end of the sixteenth century. In order to understand the position of Edgar and Edmund historically, politically and socially, I will explain how the court system and the courtier’s place in it evolved throughout the sixteenth century. In the second section, I will explain how Castiglione, Erasmus, and Machiavelli wrote instruction books for those who were already at court, and those who would be part of the court system to assist them in navigating the intricacies of court life. I will also supply a summary of the ideas of each of these conduct books that apply to the courtiers in King Lear. I will then use these ideas as the foundation for what I will call the standards of the Early Modern courtier.

The third section will show how fourteen characters in King Lear reflect the influence of the ideas in the three conduct books, but all fall short of the more complete expression of the essence of their counsel, as embodied by Edmund and Edgar. I will place these fourteen characters into four groups, the first of which contains Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia, and The Fool. These characters, who are all loyal to Lear, display only a few influences of the Early Modern courtier as reflected in the conduct books. Their behavior is not very effective; they have great difficulty dealing with the challenges with which they are presented, and by the play’s end, none of these characters survives.
The second group of characters is comprised of Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, and Oswald, who are similar in that each of them acts only to promote his or her own personal, social, and political advancement. Though they appear to understand the machinery of the Early Modern court, their respective comets burn brightly at first, but disappear very quickly. Because each of these characters has a quite limited focus, none is able to achieve the desired goal of dominance, and none survives the action of the play. The Knight, Cornwall’s three servants, and the Old Man who is Gloucester’s tenant make up the third group. I include these characters in my study because in spite of their lower social status, they do serve the monarch and the upper level courtiers, and they exemplify a number of characteristics described in the conduct books.

The Duke of Albany is the sole member of the fourth group. Because Albany displays so many qualities of the Early Modern courtier as described in the conduct books, his actions are far more effective than those of any other previously mentioned courtier. I will show the ways in which his strategies allow him to rise to power, and I will also describe the ways in which he fails to measure up to the standards of the conduct books and the reasons he finally shows himself to be an unsuccessful leader. Albany is similar to Edmund and Edgar in many ways, and the discussion of his strategy helps to point out the ways in which Gloucester's sons are even more effective than Albany in their attempts to rise to power.

The fourth section of this chapter will sum up the information in the previous three sections. In presenting this information, I will provide a framework for the very detailed discussion of Edmund and Edgar in the third and fourth chapters of my thesis. My aim is to show that Edmund and Edgar are not just two members of a tribe of
courtiers who surround the King, but that they exemplify a complex set of traits characteristic of Early Modern courtiership far more than any other courtier in the play

**Section One: The Historical, Social, and Political Background of the Late Sixteenth-Century Courtier**

The social structure changed rather rapidly in this period. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, social class in England and on the continent was largely determined by birth, and though there were some exceptions, this designation was nearly immutable. During the Renaissance, however, movement across social classes became more and more possible. Renaissance courtesy literature appeared at a time when a sense of aristocratic identity was being appropriated by ever-increasing groups of men who were not born to it. The main function of Renaissance courtesy literature, which arose during 1540-1640, was the control of the gap between the ruling classes and those who aspired to be a part of those classes. It was the members of the social elite who were the creators of courtesy books, but the consumers of the books were members of the social elite and those who aspired to better their social and economic status. The social structure based on birth, land, and title was challenged not only by the efforts of the lower classes to better themselves; this structure was also questioned by courtesy books as well which were, ironically, created to govern, postpone, and even prevent the drive toward social improvement by the lower classes. This information helps to explain some of the tension regarding inheritance and class throughout *King Lear* (Whigam 5-6).

There were two major reasons for the courtier to try to distinguish himself before the monarch as well as before his peers. In the first instance, both Henry VII and Henry VIII had made it possible for a much wider range of men to take advantage of
opportunities to acquire positions at court. While in the fifteenth century the man who would receive favor from the monarch needed to possess the skills of the soldier and the criminal, during the sixteenth century, the man who wished to better himself required the expertise of the courtier; he needed polished manners, a cultivated mind, and a stable personality. As a result of this change in paradigm for the courtier, self-depiction and self-fashioning would become very important. An added reason for the courtier to display himself in a definite way was that the courts had become nationalized and were therefore much larger. In the smaller courts, such as the Italian court of Urbino that Castiglione so carefully describes, it was possible to know everyone, but in the larger national courts of the Tudor period, acquaintance with everyone was not possible (Whigham 8).

After Elizabeth assumed the throne in 1558, she had at her disposal hundreds of offices to be bestowed, royal lands to be leased, sold or granted as a reward for services. She also had charters, licenses and monopolies to be given to those she deemed worthy. Through this process, Elizabeth hoped to maintain for her government the lasting support of the noble classes. As a result of her actions, as well as those of Henry VIII, the number of the upper classes increased threefold, while the population only doubled. Elizabeth’s successor, James I, made a concentrated effort to buy favor both for himself and for his government through the sale of honors and offices, thus increasing the already inflated numbers of politically active citizens (Whigham 9).

There were four groups of English society who were interested in receiving favors from the monarch. The first of these was composed of wealthy and influential persons for whom politics was a secondary occupation. The second group was made up of ambitious
daredevils aiming for the best prizes. More sedate men who sought only to secure a living formed the third group; the last group of men considered themselves the object of divine grace. Perhaps the most eager of this entire collection of men were the masses of younger brothers and members of the lesser gentry, who, possessing little or no patrimony and low or uncertain status, felt that they had nothing to lose by zealously pursuing political benefits and favors. Those who were clever enough or lucky enough to obtain it, for example, first-born sons, acquired personal as well as familial wealth. The strengthened relationship between the giver and the receiver served to secure royal power. Benefits were not generally bestowed by the queen herself, but by multiple tiers of courtiers and other officials; most of this activity took place between persons of adjacent rank. Thus every courtier both received and granted favors. This created much movement in the courtiers’ ranks during this period (Whigham 11-12).

The new model of the socially mobile man required a significantly higher level of education than was previously demanded. Though the sons of the families of the highest positions were educated by tutors at home, there was a marked increase in the level of attendance at university by the would-be gentry, starting at about 1530. Change in the university curriculum was also taking place--perhaps the most important innovation being that the emphasis shifted from Roman thought to Italian humanist educational theory. Alterations were visible in the organization of the program as well. Though there was definitely a rehearsal of the knightly ideal of the previous century, which stressed the exercises of war, there were also other elements included: moral and political philosophy, history, law, and modern languages (Whigham 12-13).
A number of English books existed to instruct courtiers on the appropriate modes of behavior, but conduct books in Italian were being translated much more frequently into English as well. Thus the manners of court in England were becoming more and more influenced by the refinements of Italian court life. These new developments in court customs were also taught at universities at this time. Gradually, the ruling classes in England released the model of the military armed knight, and instead began to adopt the political, intellectual and stylistic concept of self of their continental neighbors. In doing so, the forceful warrior knight was being replaced by an intellectually cultivated, urbane, well-dressed, and articulate courtier. Conflicts that were at one time solved by brute force were now diffused by the application of rhetoric, and of laws and rules. Following the example of the Italian humanists, the university man saw that there was a direct link between intellectual cultivation, leadership, and the concept of national destiny (Whigham 13).

The Early Modern courtier needed to position himself so that he could give direct advice to princes. This effort could have perhaps led to the courtier’s social advancement, or it could have provided entertainment to observers, and could perhaps even have resulted in abysmal failure. In fact, one of the uses of the courtesy books was to postpone, or account for, the lack of success in the courtiers’ attempts at social climbing. Because of the uncertain outcomes of his efforts, the courtier lived in a state of both arrogance and paranoia. He had to cope with the fact that the normative humanist expectations he learned at university did not always mesh with the realities of the court life he faced when he completed his formal studies. The competition for the best positions was fierce; those of average intellect, ability, and patronage found themselves at the level of Rosencranz,
Guildenstern, and Oswald. Though these types of courtiers received the same education and held similar dreams of the achievement of influence and of respect at court, they lacked the moral gravitas or charisma to make a successful ascent. Even those who possessed outstanding talent and ability, such as Sir Philip Sidney, could, for unfathomable reasons, be denied the choicest places at court. Though the names of the lesser courtiers are lost to history, we need to consider them as we consider the great names, (e.g., Sidney and Castiglione) as they help to round out the complete picture of the life of the English Renaissance courtier (Whigham 21).

Whether the consumer of the books was of a higher or lower rank, the conduct book was used by him as a “how to” manual for the advancement of his position, and as “a treatise governing the formation or transformation of the individual” (Whigham 26). The advice within one manual was often contradictory, and certainly there was contrast between the counsels of different manuals. What is certain is that the use of the manual always involved a thoughtful and skillful digestion and application of the text, as the courtier needed to be able to shape this advice to fit varying situations with every stratum of society (Whigham 26).

In sum, though social conditions provided opportunities to men of the lower classes that had previously not been available to them, advancement was a complicated and demanding business. The most successful aspirants in this upwardly-mobile group attended university, where they attained at least a modicum of intellectual and social cultivation. The conduct books assisted them further with suggestions regarding strategy and techniques for professional success, but this elaborate formal and personal education was no guarantee that the courtier would rise through the ranks. His success depended on
his personal attributes, adherence to the principles in the conduct books, his connections, but also a very large portion of luck. The uncertainty involved in the entire proposition was both exciting and maddening to those involved.

Section Two: The Conduct Books of Castiglione, Erasmus, and Machiavelli

In this section, I will outline the general purpose and the reception of each of the three conduct books, the main ideas contained in these books, and the reasons that they are important to my study of King Lear’s courtiers. All three of the conduct books were widely distributed, and were read and discussed with zeal by members of the upper and middle class. In treating the author’s perceived intention of these works, as well as the manner in which they were received by the public, I will explain the position of the courtier and the problems he faced in the interpretation and application of the prescriptions offered in these three books.

Castiglione

Castiglione’s The Book of the Courtier provides an example of the highest and most refined level of European courtiership in the sixteenth century. Instead of writing a simple essay on good behavior, Castiglione spent twenty years perfecting a book using the form of a witty, dynamic, and eloquent dialogue which provided expressions of opposing views, but which supplied no definite conclusions to any subject treated. Castiglione was well-prepared to write a conduct book, for he had read widely, he had mastered both Latin and Greek, he was quite familiar with the works of classic Greek and Roman authors, and he had writing experience. He was considered to be participant in the ‘high’ Renaissance, the phase which was centered in Rome, in which the most importance was placed upon rules for language, art, and behavior (Burke 22-23).
Though it was officially published in 1528, the text in some form had been circulating among Castiglione’s friends and acquaintances since 1518 (Burke 39-40). The fact that there were fifty-eight editions in the original Italian suggests that it was eagerly received by the public. One possible reason for this could be that it seemed to hold something for every segment of the Italian upper classes. There has been considerable scholarly interest in The Book of the Courtier’s effect on England; the consensus holds that there was as much interest in the book in England as there was in Italy (Burke 47-48).

Castiglione clearly considered his courtesy book to be a work of art directed to an upper class readership. The beauty and depth of his language, the subtlety of his descriptions of the arguments of the various speakers, as well as the style of their behavior all indicate the author’s cultivation, sensitivity, refinement, and vision, but also that his intention was to elevate and uplift the sensibilities of the noble, highly sophisticated reader. The following quotation provides an example of these features:

Then the soul, freed from vice, purged by studies of true philosophy, versed in spiritual life, and practised in matters of the intellect, devoted to the contemplation of her own substance, as if awakened from deepest sleep, opens those eyes which all possess but few use, and sees in herself a ray of that light which is the true image of the angelic beauty communicated to her, and of which she then communicates a faint shadow to the body. (Castiglione 303)

The terms used by Castiglione in The Book of the Courtier, such as gravita (quiet dignity), cavalleria (chivalry), and cortese (courtesy), as well as a number of other words, are used by classical and medieval and early Renaissance writers to describe desired behavior for the noble classes. The word umano (being humane) is used twice, which is a significant nod to humanist values (Burke 29). Castiglione was the first to
make grace a focal point in his creation of a picture of behavior. (Ancient writers also employed words like “grace” or “charm,” but only in the context of art or literature.) This idea of grace is closely related to the best-known concept in the dialogue: sprezzatura (Burke 30-31). The original meaning of this word was “setting no price on,” but Castiglione used it as a synonym for disinvolta which means “calm confidence.” Sprezzatura also holds connotations of “acting on the spur of the moment” (Burke 31).

Castiglione’s work provides the contemporary scholar with a model for the highly developed ideal courtier. In his work, he stresses a number of important aspects of the person of the courtier: emotional control, a sense of appropriateness, control of language, concern for the nation, cooperation, political awareness, and the ability to lead and influence. He also asserts that the courtier’s noble lineage is less important than his embodiment of all the virtues associated with nobility such as honesty, justice and courage and discernment.

According to Castiglione, the courtier’s words should always be appropriate to the matter at hand, be it witty, subtle, delicate or grave, and should be adapted to the capacity of his listeners. His speech should delight the senses produce a bright oration; it should cause him to be considered to be a moral philosopher. He should show excellence in everything, but he must especially exhibit gentleness and kindness. The author advises that every utterance and movement should be characterized by sprezzatura, an easy and effortless grace. Castiglione assures the reader that the courtier would never debate with a superior, or speak ill of anyone, and that he would most certainly avoid flattery.

Female courtiers are thought to possess wisdom, courage, and all other virtues found in men; their worth is equal to man’s worth. From women, men receive
understanding and courage. Their loving presence causes every place to be joyful. The male courtiers bear reverence to women, strive to make them happy, and fear their displeasure.

As far as the courtier’s morals are concerned, the courtier is completely honest; if his prince commands him to perform an action which he deems unethical, though he may be accused of treason, he is bound not to perform it. In fact, of all of the qualities of the courtier, the most important is his trustworthiness.

The true goal of the courtier is to win the good will and favor of the prince so that he is in a position to speak frankly to the prince without fear of displeasing him. The courtier must be filled with God’s goodness and must actually possess a much better character than the prince, so that inspire the prince to become virtuous. He will then cause the prince to rise to the station of a demi god, who gently and kindly rules over his people as a good father does over his obedient child. The courtier then assists the entire nation, for if the prince is good, the people will also be good; they will worship him, and will willingly obey him.

Erasmus

Though Castiglione does comment at length on the spiritual and moral character of both the courtier and the prince, ethical considerations are the primary focus of Erasmus’s work, *The Education of a Christian Prince*. In the early months of the year 1515, the court of Prince Charles (the future Charles V) made proposals to Erasmus to join the court. As a favor in return for this court appointment, *The Education of a Christian Prince* was written for the sixteen-year-old Charles during the course of that year. At some point after June 17, 1516, when it was released by the printer John Froben
in Basel, Erasmus presented it to Prince Charles (Born 26-27). The book appeared to be readily accepted by the reading public: in 1516, three editions were printed in Basel, and one edition was printed in Louvain. Further editions from Froben appeared between 1518 and 1525. There were eighteen editions and a number of translations of the work during Erasmus's lifetime (Born 28).

Castiglione’s conduct book was intended as an artistic creation, but Erasmus’s work was meant to be a fervent exhortation based on Christian principles to those who would train future princes:

Let the teacher paint a sort of celestial creature, more like to a divine being than a mortal: complete in all the virtues; born for the common good; yea, sent by the God above to help the affairs of mortals by looking out and caring for everyone and everything; to whom no concern is of longer standing or more dear than the state; who has more than a paternal spirit toward everyone; who holds the life of each individual dearer than his own; who works and strives night and day for just one end - to be the best he can for everyone; with whom rewards are ready for all good men and pardon for the wicked, if only they will reform - for so much does he want to be of real help to his people, without thought of recompense, that if necessary he would not hesitate to look out for their welfare at great risk to himself; who considers his wealth to lie in the advantages of his country; who is ever on the watch so that everyone else may sleep deeply; who grants no leisure to himself so that he may spend his life in the peace of his country; who worries himself with continual cares so that his subjects may have peace and quiet. Upon the moral qualities of this one man alone depends the felicity of the state. (Erasmus 163)

Erasmus further advises that the prince should be an alert and dependable leader. He requires that the prince be wise, just, moderate, temperate, and be passionate about caring for the nation and its subjects. Erasmus demands commitment from the prince to do what is right, and counsels him to eschew all forms of venality, violence, and exploitation.
Erasmus also stipulates that the prince should be freed from all private emotions; he must never let his feelings, such as love for an individual, or shame, or hatred of an enemy influence his decisions. He must jettison all personal feelings in order to serve the state with honor. He will never allow himself to be carried away by passion regarding people or material things.

Erasmus’s prince must be blessed with clear thinking and great judgment and give good advice. He makes himself available for consultation, agrees to give any person an audience who wishes to speak with him, and is attentive to their remarks. He is charming and affable to all. His true character is revealed not in his ostentatious clothing, but in his speech. Every word he utters is carefully considered and shows evidence that he is a great leader, a moral philosopher who follows the truth, and a deeply religious man.

Erasmus also states that the prince should choose the very best men in the kingdom as his friends and counselors. From them he receives information about matters which need his attention. As these men offer advice as to the best actions to take, the prince honors them as valuable members of the kingdom. With their assistance, Erasmus says that the prince should establish laws which benefit the nation, root out corruption in government and correct or punish these officials. The prince must make every attempt to eradicate crime in his country and take great measures to protect the poor and the weak.

In peacetime, Erasmus would have his prince make an effort to learn the geography of his country, and to visit all its districts and cities. He demands that the prince endeavor to build good relationships with neighboring countries. The prince loves peace and does everything he can to maintain it. However, if war cannot possibly be avoided, he fights with great vitality, and shows appreciation for his soldiers.
In sum, Erasmus’s prince sacrifices his whole existence to serve the nation. He is devoted to perfecting himself and to promoting the well-being of the nation to the point that he is regarded by his subjects as a demigod.

*Machiavelli*

While Castiglione and Erasmus envisioned a morally upright courtier and prince, Machiavelli’s concept focuses on the prince’s mastery of the practical aspects of government. Machiavelli’s *The Prince* deeply disturbed the Renaissance reader by boldly depicting the conflicts between Christian thought and the teachings of antiquity. From the ideas of ancient thinkers, Machiavelli created a new way of thinking about politics and came to stand for a viewpoint which was “distinctly modern” (Kahn 252).

At the time *The Prince* was written Machiavelli was seeking employment; he addressed the book to the new prince, Giuliano de’ Medici, in the hope that the prince might be impressed with his knowledge and allow Machiavelli to perform some function at court. Machiavelli boldly presented himself as a man who was worthy to be hired by the new prince’s regime, in spite of the fact that he had been a member of the opposing side during the revolution. The purpose of his offer of this treatise was to allow the prince to acquire the knowledge the author had accumulated through years of dangerous and difficult experience. Machiavelli believed that his discussion of political situations as they really happen was a most valuable addition to the body of instructive literature for princes. The language and focus of this particular volume was geared to a prince who had recently acquired territories and who was not experienced in the administration of his government. Machiavelli informs the prince that following the guidance in the book
would make his position even more stable than that of a leader who had inherited the new territory (Anglo 67).

Instead of directing his attention to the well-being of the nation, the main goal for Machiavelli’s prince is the waging of war for it is by this means that the prince can acquire more and more territory. Therefore, the prince’s army must be well-organized and drilled constantly. In order to stay fit, the army must continually engage in hunting; through this exercise, the prince and the army will also learn the geography of the nation.

Machiavelli advises the prince that when a new territory has been acquired, the family of the former prince must be eliminated. Also, he who is the cause of another person’s rise to power is in a weak position, because the person in power will begin to distrust the person who has assisted him. While the prince need not fear common people, he should fear nobles, as they can rise up against him. It is best, then, for the prince to give power and rewards and then remove them on a regular basis, so that there is never an equilibrium on the part of the nobles. The nobles who are not ambitious should be honored and cared for. The nobles who are ambitious and refuse to give their complete loyalty are dangerous, because in adversity, they will help to ruin the prince.

As far as general relationships are concerned, the prince should choose some wise, capable and faithful men in the state, and allow them to tell him the truth but only this regarding the subjects about which the prince inquires. Machiavelli counsels the prince to ask them questions continually, and listen to their replies and then make his own decisions. As a reward for their loyalty and candor, the Machiavelli’s prince should honor and reward these men, and seek out their company. Machiavelli warns the prince to select these advisors carefully, and that he should avoid associating with flatterers.
In regard to the ethics of the prince, Machiavelli believes that he should try to live correctly but that he should be willing to commit immoral acts if he believes that that is necessary. Because the morals of every person are so far from what they should be, Machiavelli holds that the prince who attempts to live exclusively according to his principles will soon be ruined. Therefore, Machiavelli states that the prince should not attempt to keep his word but that he should appear to have every good quality, and then do what he wishes. Further, he states that the prince must know how to disguise this practice by becoming a skilled pretender and dissembler, saying that there will always be people around him who believe him.

One of the most important ideas Machiavelli expresses is that of fortune, which he believes controls approximately half of the events in human existence. He believes that the prince who is able to maintain his courage, presence of mind, and adventurous spirit will succeed, because he will deal with the turns of fortune in the appropriate manner. The following passage demonstrates the way in which Machiavelli explains his ideas of dealing with fortune in his characteristic clear and graphic prose:

I conclude, therefore that, fortune being changeful and mankind steadfast in their ways, so long as the two are in agreement men are successful, but unsuccessful when they fall out. For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her. (143)

Machiavelli’s ideas as expressed in The Prince are important to my thesis because in this work he focuses on the survival of the individual, self-reliance, strategy, planning for goals, prioritizing decisiveness, autonomy, and leadership. Machiavelli’s approach is
practical. He does not idealize the motives of others. His ideas as expressed in *The Prince* are particularly apparent in the behavior of the second group of courtiers, but they can also be discerned in the actions of Edmund and Edgar.

There is little scholarly agreement regarding the first-hand knowledge of *Il Principe* in England during the sixteenth century (Petrina 3). Copies of the manuscript of *The Prince* circulated in England throughout this century, but the work was not translated into English until after 1640 (Petrina 4). Though the playwright may not have read the text, certainly many of his acquaintances and colleagues would have discussed its principles. It is highly likely that Shakespeare did have access to a refutation of the ideas set forth in *The Prince* in a document written by Innocent Gentillet entitled *Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté*. There are at least three very important themes found in Gentillet’s work that are treated in the text of *King Lear*. One of the ideas Gentillet presents is that the prince should accept the advice of wise counsellors and that he should conform his opinion to theirs (Gentillet 11-12). He also states that by civil law, an advisor is bound to tell the prince if there is a damaging situation in the kingdom—otherwise, that advisor is guilty of treason. He argues further that if no one tells the prince the truth about the state of affairs in the kingdom, little by little the prince is deceived and confused (Gentillet 29).

Gentillet refutes Machiavelli’s text in another way by arguing that natural laws must not be broken by the prince; he may not authorize adulteries, incests, thefts, murders, massacres, and other such crimes (Gentillet 27). Gentillet also treats the subject of a king passing his crown to his daughters, which is a topic not treated in any of the other three conduct books. Citing the French Salicke Law, which barred women from the accession
to the crown, Gentillet asserts that the king should never bestow the monarchy upon his female offspring because kingdom will then fall into the hands of strangers and be subject to “ruin and dissipation” (Gentillet 72).

While the approaches to conduct of Castiglione, Erasmus, Machiavelli, and Gentillet vary significantly, they each have certain features in common that are relevant to the reading of King Lear: all certainly stress self-determination, self-fashioning, taking control of one’s life, not submitting to the idea of pre-determination according to birth or social status. All the books also place great emphasis on self-analysis and individuality, though each author expresses these qualities in a distinctive way.

Section Three: Introduction of the Four Groups of Courtiers.

Having established the background of the time in which King Lear was written and the focus of the conduct books, as well as a description of the most important characteristics of the courtier as imagined by Castiglione, Erasmus, and Machiavelli, I will now turn to a discussion of the four groups of fourteen characters in King Lear. All of these characters are courtiers either because of their social position, or because of their behavior in the play.

The First Group of Courtiers

The first group, whose members are the closest to Lear, is comprised of Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia and the Fool. The quality that these characters have in common is their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of the monarch. These characters appear to have very little desire for self-preservation and personal advancement. When the moment arrives for them to choose between their own well-
being and safety or that of Lear, each one chooses to sacrifice himself or herself in order to serve the king. This service manifests itself in various ways for each character and is rarely acknowledged or appreciated by Lear himself. None of the characters survives and thrives at the play’s end. The acts of devotion shown by each of these characters appear to be rewards in themselves; there seems to be no recompense for the characters, other than the opportunity to express love for Lear.

Gloucester, Kent and Cordelia, though they appear to be moderately intelligent, show no imaginative flights of fancy as far as their speech is concerned. It is clear that they have not studied rhetoric or humanist principles at university. The Fool, for his part, shows enormous creativity, insight, and intellectual prowess. However, because his idiolect is associated with common people, his arguments like those of the three other characters, lack the power to persuade. The fact that none of these characters lives on at the closing of the play may be seen as a testament that their methods are not compatible with the increasingly complex demands of the Early Modern period.

Gloucester

Gloucester is a character who makes a very poor showing as a courtier at the beginning of the play, but whose more commendable qualities emerge as the action of the play progresses. His first appearance on stage is not very promising: he slanders Edmund's mother at length, in the presence of Edmund and Kent (1.1.7-14), which is behavior that is contrary to the counsel of Castiglione, who writes: “And I beleave everye one of us knoweth, that it is meete the Courtier beare verie great reverence towarde women...” (183). Castiglione also counsels the courtier in this way:
let him consider wel what the thing is he doth or speaketh, the place wher
it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it,
his age, his profession, the ende whereto it tendeth, and the meanes that
may bring him to it: and so let him apply himselfe discreetly with these
advertisementes to whatsoever he mindeth to doe or speake. (95)

There is more evidence of Gloucester’s lack of stability and good judgment in the second
scene of the first act when he reads the letter Edmund presents to him and without further
investigation of the matter, decides to have Edgar burned for treason (2.1.55-63). Erasmus states that the prince must “control himself...he must prove that he is rational,
has keen judgment, is clear thinking and circumspect” (Erasmus 171), so Gloucester’s
decision is rather wide of the mark in terms of these requirements. Gloucester proves here
that he is unable to control his fear of being abandoned and replaced by Edgar. He also
shows that he is unable to think rationally in a crisis and that he lacks the power to place
events in their proper perspectives. Another aspect of this incident involves Gloucester’s
susceptibility to Edmund’s flattery; he is only too willing to believe Edmund’s
presentation of the situation, and chooses to trust a man whom he does not know.
Erasmus presents a dire warning concerning this practice when he writes: “Let no one
think that the evil of flatterers (being a sort of minor evil) should be passed over: the most
flourishing empires of the greatest kings have been overthrown by the tongues of
flatterers” (193).

Erasmus also writes that “a prince should excel in every kind of wisdom” (174),
but Gloucester shows precious little of this quality in the first act of the play. The
following excerpt from his lengthy speech in the second act shows that instead of
analyzing situations that arise, taking appropriate action, and assuming responsibility for
the events which take place, Gloucester is willing to believe that planetary influences are fully responsible for everything that happens:

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... (1.2.95-99)

Gloucester’s chief redeeming feature as a courtier is that he cares for Lear and, in spite of the grave danger of his situation, attempts to assist Lear and defend his honor in every way. Erasmus’s prince “want[s] to be of real help to his people, without thought of recompense, that if necessary he would not hesitate to look out for their welfare at great risk to himself” (160) and there are several instances later in the play where Gloucester attempts to assist other characters to the detriment of his own safety. For example, in the second act, Gloucester also tries to defend Caius, and to prevent him from being stocked. In this action, he also wishes to preserve the dignity of Lear, as well (2.2.139-144). In the third act, when Cornwall and Regan take over his estate, he procures shelter for Lear, and then arranges for him to be taken to Dover, where Lear will be protected (3.3.133-137). Earlier in the same act, he also reveals another praiseworthy aspect of his character in that he exhibits an awareness of the problematic political situation in England, and takes steps to remedy it. Here, he shows a level of the “alertness” (140) that Erasmus requires of the prince.

...There is division betwixt the Dukes, and a worse matter than that. I have received a letter this night- 'tis dangerous to be spoken- I have lock'd the letter in my closet. These injuries the King now bears will be revenged home; there's part of a power already footed; we must incline to the King. I will seek him and privily relieve him... (3.3.7-13)
Finally, after he is blinded, Gloucester, reveals some of his best personal qualities: when he perceives the witless and disheveled Lear on the heath outside Dover, his first exclamation is this: “O, let me kiss that hand!” (4.5.125). Here, in spite of the fact that Lear holds virtually no power, Gloucester bestows upon him “the reverence and respecte that beecommeth the servaunte towarde the mayster” to which Castiglione refers in *The Book of the Courtier* (105).

In this same act, Gloucester also displays some insight into his own character, when he tells his tenant: “I have no way, and therefore want no eyes/ I stumbled when I saw” (4.1.18-19), which shows that in his sorrow and adversity he has acquired the wisdom he previously lacked. Erasmus’s prince must have wisdom (152) but he must also have love (206) and after Gloucester recovers from his suicide attempt, he cries, “If Edgar live, O, bless him!” (4.5.40), which expresses the sincere feeling he holds for the son he will never see again.

The events of the play provide Gloucester with the opportunity to expand from a rather unstable, unfocused, impulsive, and self-involved individual to one who possesses many more of the characteristics of the Early Modern courtier. Though Gloucester does not exercise enough of these qualities to become a great leader, his movement toward maturity and enlightenment are worthy of acknowledgement.

*Kent*

In the first scene of the play, Kent reveals himself to be a kind, understanding, and collegial older courtier, as he graciously greets Edmund (1.1.28). There is some indication, thus, that he might bear the qualities of Erasmus’s prince, “who is given to acts of kindness” (171) and Castiglione’s courtier, who must use words which are “apt,
chosen, clere, and wel applied” (52). Later in this scene, however, when Kent attempts to convince Lear to change his mind regarding the disinherittance of Cordelia, his lack of finesse and delicacy in this effort becomes woefully apparent: “What wouldst thou do, old man? /Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak/ When power to flattery bows?” (1.1.145-146). Castiglione states that polished speech would be “in vain and of smal accompte yf the sentences expressed by the wordes should not be fair, witty, subtil, fine and grave according to the mater” (56). Kent fails to exhibit the most basic level of diplomacy here: he calls Lear “old man” in front of the entire court. Castiglione writes that the courtier “shall not be yll tunged, and especiallye againste his superiours.... (106). Kent’s speech is blunt and plain, which alienates Lear and closes the door to further communication. Lear’s well-being come first with him, but Kent shows that he has no power to negotiate. Kent is therefore ineffectual as a courtier in the style of Castiglione, even though his devotion to the king is sincere:

My life I never held but as a pawn
To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,
Thy safety being the motive. (1.1.155-158)

Erasmus addresses this kind of person when he writes, “But in the case of the prince, it is of little help that he shall have been endowed with a good mind that desires the best things if there is not also present wisdom which points the way to gain that which the prince desires” (187).

Kent makes another attempt to reach Lear in the following manner: “See better, Lear, and let me still remain/ The true blank of thine eye” (1.1.156-157). However, when Lear fails to yield to Kent’s pleading, Kent reveals his short fuse, a quality which Castiglione would never sanction: “Now by Apollo, King, /Thou swear'st thy gods in
vain” (1.1.158). Castiglione writes that the courtier’s job is to insinuate himself into the monarch’s consciousness

...powringe therinto through most quiet waies a vehement persuasion that may incline him to honestie, maketh him quiet and full of rest, in everie part equall and of good proportion: and on everie side framed of a certein agreement with him self, that filleth him with... a cleare caulmenesse, that that he is never out of pacience: and becommeth full and wholy most obedient to reason... (271)

Kent reveals his lack of strategy here; he finds himself in a hole, and he keeps digging. Instead of backing off and using a more deferential and persuasive approach with Lear, he swears to the gods and publicly reinforces the idea that Lear has made a wrong decision. This reaction conflicts further with Castiglione’s principles of the courtier’s attitude toward the monarch stated above. Instead employing a strategy which would render Lear “quiet and full of rest,” and promoting a clear calmness in the king, Kent presses on in accusatory tone:

Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
Upon the foul disease. Revoke thy gift,
Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
I'll tell thee thou dost evil. (1.1.160-163)

Kent also reveals in these transactions that his capacity to manipulate language is limited, which underscores the importance of Castiglione’s principles. This courtier neglects to exercise the patience and understanding that Erasmus advises for the prince as well.

When he chooses to disguise himself as Caius, Kent admits that deception and dissembling are methods that he must employ if he is to continue to serve Lear and to protect him. In this way, he does adapt himself to the situation, according to Machiavelli’s concepts of fortuna and virtu. However, his handling of Oswald proves his lack of acceptance of, and inability to negotiate, Early Modern social trends. Kent is able
to disguise himself to assist Lear, but he cannot accept that the paradigms of court life have shifted. He picks a fight with Oswald, insults him, and threatens him with physical violence. Castiglione advises the courtier to behave in a way which is “sober, and keapinge hym alwayes within his boundes” (106). There is no plan for advancement of Lear’s situation here--Kent just wants to teach Oswald a lesson and to show dominance. Instead of choosing his battles in order to win the war, Kent begins his struggle in full force when he perceives that Oswald disrespects Lear. Kent not only draws his sword, but he loses his temper once more, which displays of lack of self-control not sanctioned by any of the authors of the conduct books. Erasmus addresses this issue when he writes about the prince: “Let the concern for the state completely cover your personal ambitions. If you cannot defend your realm without violating justice, without wanton loss of human life, without great loss to religion, give up and yield to the importunities of the age!” (155).

Though Kent appears inept and incapable in a number of critical areas, it must be noted that he shows masterful competencies in other realms. In the first scene of the third act, he exhibits a surprising comprehension of internal and external affairs. He is more subtle and perceptive in his assessment of his surroundings than we have seen before. He is completely aware of the instability of the country, and the dangers to the nation and to individuals which that imbalance entails (3.1.9-20). Though Kent allowed himself to be distracted by Oswald, the fact that he can and does take an eager interest in the country’s affairs provides an example of the employment of Machiavelli’s statement that the prince should always keep his focus on maintaining and acquiring territory:
A Prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only upholds those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that rank. And, on the contrary, it is seen that when princes have thought more of ease than of arms they have lost their states. And the first cause of your losing it is to neglect this art; and what enables you to acquire a state is to be master of the art. (79)

In Act III scene 2, which takes place on the heath near Dover, Kent shows the deepest kindness and patience, and the most tender courtesy toward Lear. He indulges the monarch as one would a fretful child, even to the point of bringing a madman along into the farmhouse that Gloucester has arranged as a shelter for the king. Kent also acts like a father toward Lear, in that he displays an understanding of Lear’s feelings for Cordelia:

A sovereign shame so elbows him; his own unkindness,
That stripp’d her from his benediction, turn’d her
To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights
To his dog-hearted daughters- these things sting
His mind so venomously that burning shame
Detains him from Cordelia. (4.3.42-47)

Erasmus writes that the prince is one “who has more than a paternal spirit toward everyone; who holds the life of each individual dearer than his own; who works and strives night and day for just one end--to be the best he can for everyone” (162) and Kent’s attitude toward Lear shows that this quality is very much in evidence in this scene.

In Act 4 scene 7, when he finally meets Cordelia and she tries to thank him for his services, we see one of the noblest part of Kent:

To be acknowledg’d, madam, is o'erpaid.
All my reports go with the modest truth;
Nor more nor clipp'd, but so. (4.6.4-7)

He is extremely attached to the persons of Lear and Cordelia. For him, courtiership is not just a job. It is a calling, like the priesthood, which echoes the philosophy of Erasmus. In
Act V scene three, we see just how important Kent’s single-minded purpose is in 
preserving the monarch: “I am come /To bid my king and master aye good night. Is he 
not here?” (5.3.208-209). All the other characters in the scene are busy trying to map out 
strategy. In this case, we see that there has to be someone looking out for Lear, because 
he has been forgotten by everyone else. In this instance, Kent embodies Erasmus’s prince 
in that he is “deeply concerned for those over whom he rules and is their protector” (171).

With the passing of Lear, Kent’s life is over. Thus the courtier lives and dies for 
and with the King: “I have a journey, sir, shortly to go./My master calls me; I must not 
say no” (5.3.296-297). Kent himself realizes that, though he has worked valiantly to serve 
Lear, his abilities and skills would never suffice as a king in this rapidly developing 
complex Early Modern world.

*The Fool*

The Fool is unique in the entire collection of courtiers in that he operates with 
completely selfless detachment; he holds no motive other than the improvement of the 
character of King Lear. Castiglione’s definition of the courtier’s purpose allows us to 
view the Fool as a courtier:

> [The purpose of the courtier is to make] sure it is that the mind of him 
> which thinketh to worke so, that his Prince shall not be deceived, nor lead 
> with flaterers, railers and lyers, but shall knowe both the good and the bad 
> and beare love to the one and hatred to the other, is directed to a very good 
> ende. (262).

Certainly the Fool works diligently to turn the mind of the king to the truth of his own 
situation as well as the state of the nation. All of the Fool’s language is directed to this 
end. Erasmus, too, asserts that a chief concern for the prince “is to add companions of an 
honest character …so that they will be affable without using flattery, will be accustomed
to speak elegantly, and will not deceive or lie merely to curry favor” (194). The Fool also fits this description; he is nothing if not completely honest in his assessment of Lear and the members of his court.

Lear. Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool. All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with. (1.4. 130-132)

As far as elegant speaking is concerned, the Fool creates his own brand of this quality. An example of this is the poem below composed of a sestet and aquatrain, which is actually the Fool’s own beautifully condensed conduct book for Lear:

Mark it, nuncle.
Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest,
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest;
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score. (1.4.104-114)

In regard to the Fool’s artistry and skill, Castiglione writes further that:

The good use of speach therefore I beleve ariseth of men that have wytte,
and with learninge and practise have gotten a good judgement, and with it consent and agree to receave the woordes that they think good, which are known by a certaine naturall judgement, and not by art or anye maner rule. (59)

The Fool also shows an extraordinary level of natural judgment, which cannot be learned through formal education or by rules. An example of this is:

Fool. Give me an egg, nuncle, and I'll give thee two crowns.

Lear. What two crowns shall they be?
Fool. Why, after I have cut the egg i' th' middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clowest thy crown i' th' middle and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away. If I speak like myself in this, let him be whipp'd that first finds it so. (1.126-132)

This speech, as well as numerous others, displays a fearful intelligence, wit, insight, and boldness, which is matched by few other courtiers in the play.

The relationship between Lear and the Fool also fits the paradigm described by Machiavelli in The Prince, when he writes that

Therefore a wise prince ought to hold a third course by choosing the wise men in his state, and giving to them only the liberty of speaking the truth to him, and then only of those things of which he inquires, and of none others; but he ought to question them upon everything, and listen to their opinions, and afterwards form his own conclusions. (131)

Lear does form his own opinions, but unfortunately, he seems to accept none of the truths offered by the honest and faithful Fool. He appears not to understand the immense value of the Fool to his own well-being and that of the nation. In cases such as this, Castiglione makes the following suggestion:

...if his chaunce be to serve a Prince of so ill a nature, that by longe custome is growen in use with vices...For in this cast he ought to forsake his service, least he beare the blame of his Lordes yll practices, or feele the hartgreefe that all good men have which serve the wicked. (300-301)

In fact, the Fool’s last line is in the sixth scene of the third act, so, though the audience does not know how, the Fool has indeed forsaken Lear’s service.

What is certain is that, though his social status is very low, the Fool embodies many, many of the characteristics of the Early Modern courtier. Perhaps the most important quality he possesses is that of a philosopher, which is described by Erasmus: “I do not mean by philosopher, one who is learned in the ways of dialectic or physics, but
one who casts aside the false pseudo-realities and with open mind seeks and follows the truth” (150). Though he does provide comfort and companionship to Lear, the Fool is not successful in changing Lear’s thinking or behavior. His real accomplishment is his embodiment of the purity of motive of the Early Modem courtier, who with no thought of his own well-being or advancement, serves with consummate moral strength, skill, and profound love for the king.

**Cordelia**

Cordelia is dignified, loving, morally upright, and loyal. She is similar to Kent, Gloucester and the Fool in that she is devoted to the person of Lear. However, she hurts and humiliates him in front of all members of the court. Castiglione states that Lady Emilia Pia brought to every man “understanding and courage” and that her social skills changed the palace into “the verye mansion place of Myrth and Joye.” (20), implying that female courtiers can and should exercise this power. Cordelia’s speech in Act I scene one is both logical and accurate, but she makes no attempt to soften her words to Lear to fill him with understanding and courage. Castiglione advises the courtier to speak in a way which is “fair, witty, subtil, fine [or] grave according to the mater” (56), but Cordelia neglects to do this. Instead, her speech is absurdly, brutally, obstinately plain.

Nothing, my lord.

... 

Nothing.

... 

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond; no more nor less. (1.1.89-108)
When she tells Lear in the first act that she only loves him as a daughter might, her rhetoric is so stark and so cold that he queries wistfully, “So young, and so untender?” Her response to this question is: “So young, my lord, and true” (1.1.111). This reply indicates that she naively believes that truth telling and tenderness are mutually exclusive. Castiglione, Erasmus, and Machiavelli all warn the courtier and the prince to beware of flattery, but in this instance, Cordelia takes these warnings much too far. Cordelia has clearly overstepped her bounds in this situation. She is not only Lear’s daughter, but she is also a courtier, and she has failed to behave in the reverent and respectful manner which is required of a woman of her station.

Castiglione also advises the courtier to “bee suche a one that shall never wante good communycatyon” (137). In Cordelia’s failure to convey her feelings to Lear in a more subtle and nuanced manner, she not only creates a breach with him, but she also causes ill feelings between Lear and the king of France, which eventually leads to an international disaster, and the loss of many lives. There is further counsel from Erasmus on this subject, who advises the prince to “perform kindnesses even to those who are ungrateful, to those who do not understand” (208); if Cordelia had used just a little more gentleness and kindness in dealing with Lear, both personal and national tragedy might have been averted.

In the case of Cordelia, it is apparent that while she, like Kent, possesses the deepest love and regard for Lear, her manner of expressing her feelings prevents her from behaving as an effective Early Modern courtier.
The Second Group of Courtiers

The second group of courtiers is comprised of Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, and Oswald. None of these characters shows loyalty to Lear’s regime. Each of the characters in this group displays a desire for political advancement. Each shows a rapacious appetite for power, for personal satisfaction, for playing the political game. All of these characters demonstrate the willingness to forgo every form of moral constraint in order to achieve personal and professional goals; they are willing to say or do anything to get what they want. There are no altruists in this group. While it appears as if some of them work toward common ends with other characters, they all actually regard this collaboration as the means to the achievement of their own goals. The quality which unites them is their total involvement with their own personal well-being. Their focus is completely pure in that it is unadulterated by any thought for the common good.

The speech of these characters often shows drive, decisiveness, and even a certain cleverness, but these courtiers are not philosophers; they do not display the creative thinking characterized by the humanist strains in university education. Their verbal expression shows that they know how to give orders, how to state their desires, how to intimidate the less powerful, and how to affirm their self-worth. None of these characters changes significantly over the course of the action, but they do all display the ambition, passion, and amoral stance which signals the influence of certain trends in Early Modern thinking; strains of Machiavelli’s counsels can often, though not always, be found in the motivations and strategies of these characters.

Cornwall
Cornwall is a courtier who exhibits the ambition of Machivelli's prince, but whose behavior and actions are not inspired by any of the refining or spiritual elements of Erasmus's prince, or Castiglione's courtier. I argue here that Cornwall is unsuccessful as a courtier because he actually displays very few of the characteristics described in any of the three conduct books.

As far as ethics and judgment are concerned, Erasmus writes that if a man wishes to show himself to be "an excellent prince [he must] see that no one outshines [him] in the qualities befitting [his] position...wisdom, temperance, [and] integrity (151). In Act II scene one, on hearing that Gloucester's life was threatened by Edgar, without taking the time to reflect upon the situation, or to investigate it, Cornwall makes a snap judgment about Edmund and his loyalty, and accepts Edmund immediately as a protégé.

Edmund, I hear that you have shown your father
A childlike office. (2.1.103-104)

... 
For you, Edmund,
Whose virtue and obedience doth this instant
So much commend itself, you shall be ours.
Natures of such deep trust we shall much need;
You we first seize on. (2.1. 111-114)

This action shows that Cornwall is inclined only to look at the surface of matters and that he is surely lacking in the qualities Erasmus mentions above.

Erasmus writes further that the prince should "Follow the right, [and] do violence to no one," (154). However, in the second scene of the second act, when Cornwall perceives that there is a quarrel between Caius and Oswald, without first hearing the details of the situation, he says: "Keep peace, upon your lives! /He dies that strikes again" (2.2.43-44).
In this situation, too, without thoroughly investigating the nature of the conflict, Cornwall makes a decision about Caius’s character:

This is some fellow
Who, having been prais’d for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he!
An honest mind and plain- he must speak truth!
An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know which in this plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly-ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely. (2.1-87-98)

Not only does he neglect to resolve the conflict between the two men, he mocks Caius for his plain speech. He also asserts the ungrounded argument that those who speak plainly are more corrupt than those who obviously flatter and dissemble in order to please their superiors.

In order to punish Caius for his transgressions, Cornwall orders Kent to be placed in the stocks. When Caius objects that his being placed in the stocks would insult Lear, whom he serves, Cornwall remains adamant, and at Regan’s urging orders that his time should extend until the next day. Gloucester intervenes at this point, citing the inappropriate harshness of the punishment, and reiterating Caius’s concern for the preservation of Lear’s dignity (2.2.118-123). However, Cornwall adheres to his decision, which displays the verity of Erasmus’s statement: “Power without goodness is unmitigated tyranny; without wisdom it brings chaos, not domain” (158).

The incident with Caius provides a foreshadowing of the manner in which he treats Lear in the fourth scene of the second act. First, Cornwall refuses to speak to Lear, and then withholds sympathy for the righteous indignation that Lear expresses regarding
Goneril’s behavior toward him. When Regan and Goneril both begin to torment Lear by demanding that he reduce his entourage from one hundred knights to none at all, Cornwall does not intervene to defend him. This behavior suggests a statement from *The Education of a Christian Prince* regarding the behavior of an immoral ruler: “a tyrant is happy to stir up factions and strife between his subjects and feeds and aids chance animosities” (163). When the aged Lear, in a mad fury, flees their presence, Cornwall tells Gloucester that Lear should be left alone and orders the doors of Gloucester’s castle to be shut. Here, there is an example of the advice to Machiavelli, which states that: “He who has annexed them, if he wishes to hold them, [must see] that the family of their former lord is extinguished” (11). This incident illustrates once more that Cornwall wields power but does not create sound relationships.

When Cornwall discovers that Gloucester has been assisting Lear, his vexation moves him to the desire to punish Gloucester. However, the army of France has landed, and it is imperative that he, Regan, Albany, Goneril and Edmund begin planning the defense of England. Instead of postponing this punishment in order to tend to matters that involve national security, which follow the essence of the instructions of Machiavelli, Cornwall immediately sends his servants to capture Gloucester, who is absolutely no threat to him, or to the country. He sends Goneril and Edmund away so that he and Regan can take time out to torture Gloucester when he should actually be planning to defend the nation. Cornwall admits that he commits this act of torture is a “court’sy to [his own] wrath” (3.7.25). Thus his use of violence would not be sanctioned by Machiavelli, as it forms no part of a political strategy; Cornwall tortures Gloucester for his own personal satisfaction. Instead of waiting to put Gloucester on trial for treason, and then administer
the standard punishment, Cornwall chooses torture, “which men may blame but not control” (3.7.26). Erasmus warns against ‘[the] tyrant [who] directs whatever suits his pleasure…he considers the wickedest things the most desirable, being utterly misled by his ignorance or personal feelings…” (174). Castiglione wishes the courtier to be open to friendship and amity, and desires him to be gentle, lowly, freeharted, easie to be spoken to.” (120).

When Cornwall’s servant observes the torture which Cornwall inflicts upon Gloucester, he draws on his master, and quickly inflicts a mortal wound. Machiavelli warns that the prince “should avoid those things which will make him hated or contemptible” (101). What is clear then, is that Cornwall’s method of executing his princely duties veers widely from the mark which Erasmus and Castiglione would prescribe. Though it may appear that Cornwall’s method of rule is associated closely with that of Machiavelli, I argue that this is not the case: Machiavelli’s prince always concentrates on defending his territory, and never allows himself to be swayed by emotion. Machiavelli does condone violence in the path of national security or the acquisition of territory, but the implication in his writing is that violence fueled by personal emotion is not sanctioned in any way. My conclusion here is that Cornwall does not survive because he actually adheres to very little counsel found in the three courtesy books, and therefore does not provide a full example of the Early Modern courtier.

Regan

Regan is actually a fitting consort for Cornwall in that her behavior and speech reflect an exceptional ambition. Like Cornwall, she is also an extremely skilled flatterer and dissembler. In Act I scene 1 Regan copies Goneril in her speech and then merely adds that she professes herself
"an enemy to all other joys
Which the most precious square of sense possesses,
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear Highness' love (1.1.70-73)

This is an example of accomplished flattery: Erasmus speaks out against this practice, warning the prince that he should be careful of flattery, "spoken in the guise of faith and frankness" (146) as Regan has spoken to Lear. Later in the same scene, she discusses Lear’s condition with Goneril, and is perfectly willing to scheme with her against their father. Unlike Edmund, who speaks of the conflict between his political ambitions and his family bonds (3.5.2001-2002), Regan seems to have no problem conniving with Goneril against her father (1.1.312-331). Castiglione holds that the female courtier must “have a good grace of nature in all her doinges, to be of good condcyons, wyttye, foreseeyng, not haughtie, not envious, not yll tunged, not light, not contentious, not untowardlye...” (190) but Regan chooses to join forces with her sister to remove Lear from the picture.

Erasmus states that the prince should be “given to acts of kindness and slowly moved to vengeance; that he is true, constant, unbending, prone to the side of justice,” (171) but like Cornwall, Regan asserts her authority through cruel acts. For example, she admits that she plans not to be at home when Lear and his knights come to lodge with her (2.1.98-103). When offering her opinion about the stocking of Kent, she proposes that instead of lasting a few hours the punishment should last through the entire day and night. When she speaks to Lear in act two, scene four, she lets him know that it is his own fault that Goneril disrespects him. She even suggests that Lear return to Goneril and apologize to her for the abuse he has received from her. She herself shows the most shocking disregard for Lear’s feelings in the following speech:
O, sir, you are old!
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine. You should be rul'd, and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore I pray you
That to our sister you do make return;
Say you have wrong'd her, sir (2.4.311-317).

Later in the same scene, she attempts through chop logic to remove the companionship and protection which Lear’s knights offer him. She continues with Goneril to play mind games with Lear by first offering to keep fifty knights, then reducing the number to twenty-five, then one, and then none (2.2.366-429). By constantly shifting the terms of the agreement made in the first act, Regan and Goneril succeed in driving the desperate and frustrated Lear first to rage, and then to tears (2.2.430-450). Instead of the “understandinge and courage” (20) which Castiglione’s lady would offer a gentleman, Regan forces him to the brink of madness. Her speech and actions are in direct conflict with Castiglione’s instructions that she “shall not...come towarde him...as though they would make of one their equall, or showe favour to an inferiour of theirs” (107).

When Lear flees their company, even though a wild storm is about to break, she orders the doors to be shut (2.2.467). When she and Cornwall discover that Gloucester has assisted Lear, she proposes to go beyond the bounds of the law by hanging him instantly (3.7.3). After Cornwall takes out one eye, she insists that he remove the other also (3.7.68). This behavior is a far, far cry from Erasmus’s vision, who would have the ruler be “mild, peaceful, lenient, foresighted, just, humane, magnanimous, frank” (171).

When Cornwall’s servant arises to confront Cornwall for his injustice, she breaks all forms of propriety (that it is not comlye for a woman to practise feates of armes, (Castiglione 153) by taking a sword and attacking him from behind. Erasmus declares
that the prince should “Follow the right, do violence to no one” (154) but Regan shows her assertiveness further when she sends Oswald out to murder Gloucester.

Regan is able to manipulate language to some degree, but she does not appear to possess any of the other qualities of Castiglione’s female courtier: kindness, modesty, sweetness, and love. She shows none of Erasmus’s moral rectitude. Though she seems able to strategize, which would link her to Machiavelli, she actually has no concrete plans for the nation. She commits brutal acts, but as these do not further any larger plan, she cannot really be considered to possess the vision which Machiavelli supports in his conduct book. Thus, her character does not provide a particularly good example of the Early Modern Courtier.

Goneril

Goneril also displays plenty of eagerness to improve her station in life. At the beginning of the first act, she shows that she knows how to play the part which will allow her to survive and flourish at court. She gives her father what he asks for; her response to his request we can easily acknowledge as outrageous flattery, but it appears that this is what Lear wants and expects (1.1.55-62). However, all three of the conduct books condemn this practice. Castiglione warns that the courtier should be “no lyar, no boaster, nor fonde flatterer,” (107). Machiavelli also speaks out against flatterers, whom he calls “pests”, stating that the prince who listens to them will be “overthrown.” (131). Erasmus cautions most firmly against them:

Let no one think that the evil of flatterers (being a sort of minor evil) should be passed over: the most flourishing empires of the greatest kings have been overthrown by the tongues of flatterers. Nowhere do we read of a state which has been oppressed under a great tyranny in which flatterers did not play the leading roles in the tragedy. (193)
Thus, this practice of flattery by Goneril and its effectiveness reveals not only a great deal about Lear’s court but about her personage as well. Another side of Goneril’s character is revealed when Cordelia bids farewell to Goneril and Regan; Goneril supplies a tart response to her sister’s request that they care for Lear: “Prescribe not us not our duties (1.1.300). As Castiglione observes that it is well for women “to have a tendernes, soft and milde, with a kinde of womanlie sweetnes” (189), it is evident that Goneril does not conform to that image of womanhood. Later in the scene, Goneril plots with Regan regarding the ways that they should manage Lear. Her speeches are filled with analyses of his character and the strategy which will benefit her estate, and not about any emotional regard she holds for her father. Erasmus opines that “The best formula is this: let him love, who would be loved…” (206), but Goneril’s speech and actions adhere to the model of one who seeks power.

Erasmus argues that “The real character of the prince is revealed by his speech rather than by his dress.” (201). In Goneril’s case, her speech displays a profound dissatisfaction with the people who surround her; she complains at length about Lear and Albany, and then later, about Edmund. The first example is in in Act 1, scene three, when she refers to Lear as “idle old man” (1.3.16Q). In the next scene, she scolds Lear, and complains bitterly about the behavior of the Fool and Lear’s riotous knights (1.3.6), (1.4.202-206), (1.4.217-218). In her conversation with Edmund, she complains about Albany, citing “the cowish terror of his spirit” (4.2.13). After some suggestive speech to Edmund, she assures him that “My fool usurps my body (4.2. 28). In her speech to Albany later in that same act, she abuses him most profoundly, calling him “Milk-liver’d man!” (4.2.30), and “vain fool” (4.2.37). This kind of speech and behavior is completely
at odds with Castiglione’s female courtier, whose function it is to encourage men, and to be kind to them; he would have her show

a certein sweetnesse in language that may delite, wherby she may gentlie entertain
all kinde of men with talke woorth the hearynge and honest, and applyed to the time and place, and to the degree of the person she communed withall: accompaniying with sober and quiet maners and with the honestye that must alwayes be a stay to all her deeds, a readie livelines of wit, wherby she may declare herselfe far wide from all dulnesse: but with such a kinde of goodnes, that she may be esteamed no lesse chaste, wise and courteous, then pleasant, feat conceited and sobre: (151)

Machiavelli’s philosophy holds that “A prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules” (79). However, Goneril reveals that her personal life with Edmund is more important than the political situation in her country: “I had rather lose the battle than that sister /Should loosen him and me” (5.1. 20-21). Though her personal concerns are more important to her than national ones, she pretends as if she prioritizes the well-being and sovereignty of the nation. “Combine together 'gainst the enemy:/ For these domestic and particular broils/ Are not the question here” (5.2.31-33).

Castiglione refers to “the tender breast of a woman” (29) in his discussion of the female courtier, but this feature is nowhere in evidence in Goneril’s attitude after Edmund loses the duel with Edgar. Instead of attempting to care for Edmund or to console him, Goneril tells him how wrong he was to duel with the masked stranger in the first place (5.3.143-146). Here she makes her priorities evident: she was not so much concerned with Edmund as a person, but rather with the power and the assertiveness which he might offer which would match her own. Because Goneril is, in fact, Edmund’s social superior, she should, according to Erasmus, be “deeply concerned for [him, and act
as his] protector..." she should be “given to acts of kindness” (171) toward him, especially since he has served the country in defeating the invader.

In sum, though Goneril shows some ability to plan for her own advancement, she cannot really be said to embody many of the traits of the Early Modern courtier; she lacks the refinement, emotional engagement, discipline, perspective, personal initiative, and vision to embody a full example of the courtier and the prince as described by Castiglione. Erasmus, and Machiavelli.

Oswald

The character of Oswald is in an extremely difficult position, for, as Goneril’s steward, in order to retain his position, he is required to commit acts of iniquity. Castiglione addresses this important subject in this way:

I woulde have you to clere me of one doubt that I have in my head, ...namely, whether a gentleman be bound or no, while he is in his Princis service, to obey him in all thinges which he shal commaund, though they were dishonest and shamefull matters.

In dishoneste matters we are not bounde to obey any body, aunswered Syr Fridericke. (112)

The wisdom of this advice becomes evident as Oswald’s story unfolds. He is ordered to disrespect Lear, who is visiting Goneril, and he is struck for committing that disrespect. He makes a simple request of Kent who is disguised as Caius, who trips him, insults him, and picks a fight with him because of his association with Goneril. Kent’s real quarrel is with Goneril, but Oswald’s association with her is profoundly incriminating. Erasmus writes that “the life of the prince mirrored in the morals of his people... No comet, no dreadful power affects the progress of human affairs as the life of the prince grips and
transforms the morals and character of his subjects” (157). Though Goneril’s influence is powerful, Castiglione holds firmly that this cannot be an excuse for the courtier to behave badly:

The ende therfore of a perfect Courtier... I beleave is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies enfourme him francklye of the trueth of everie matter meete for him to understande, without fear or perill to displease him. (260)

According to Castiglione, then Oswald is not succeeding as a courtier, for his speeches show that he is never allowed to assert an opinion in her presence. Castiglione goes on to say that the courtier should have so much influence over the prince that when he knoweth his minde [the prince] is bent to commit any thinge unseemlie for him, to be bould to stande with him in it, and to take courage after an honest sort at the favour which he hath gotten him through his good qualities, to dissuade him from everie ill pourpose, and to set him in the waye of vertue. And so shall the Courtier, if he have the goodnesse in him that these Lordes have geven him accompanied with readinesse of witt, pleasantnesse, wisedome, knowleage in letters and so many other thinges, understande how to beebehave himselfe readilye in all occurentes to drive into his Princis heade what honour and profit shall ensue to him and to his by justice, liberalitie, valiauntnesse of courage, meekenesse and by the other vertues that beelong to a good Prince... (260)

All of Oswald’s speeches indicate that he never attempts to question Goneril’s reasoning or to invite her to reflect on the motivations for her actions and their possible outcomes. As her courtier, he should encourage her to develop what Erasmus calls “the requisite kingly qualities of wisdom, justice, moderation, foresight, and zeal for the public welfare” (140). However, Oswald never makes an effort to do this, and nothing in his speech or actions indicate that he feels that he suffers from a moral dilemma.
Though Oswald’s slavish obedience to Goneril’s orders might be interpreted as personal loyalty in the first three acts of the play, the dialogue between Oswald and Regan proves that this is not the case. When Regan promises him a reward for murdering Gloucester, Oswald eagerly agrees to seek him out. (4.4.38-39). Castiglione addresses this very subject in *The Book of the Courtier*:

> What... if I be in service with a Prince...and he happen to commaunde me to kyll a man, or any other like matter, ought I to refuse to do it? You ought, answered Syr Fridericke, to obey your Lorde in all things that tend to his profitt and honour, not in suche matters that tende to his losse and shame....ye are not onely not bounde to doe it, but ye are bounde not to doe it, bothe for your owne sake and for being a minister of the shame of your Lorde. (112)

Oswald has shown his lack of moral strength numerous times throughout the action, but in act four, scene six, when he takes on Edgar disguised as a peasant, he also exhibits a want of power and skill in the martial arts. Castiglione asserts that “the principall and true profession of a Courtyer ought to be in feates of armes,” (35) but Oswald, though he wields a sword, is swiftly defeated by Edgar, who bears only a cudgel.

Thus is Oswald’s death as ignominious as his life. While Erasmus calls for the prince to be, among other things: “mild, peaceful, lenient, foresighted, just, humane, magnanimous, frank. just, sensible, mindful of religious matters, with a thought to the affairs of men...reliable, steadfast, infallible, planning great things, endowed with influential judgment…”(171), it is clear that Oswald was none of these things; he was merely attempting to survive in a difficult and dangerous environment. This character provides a wonderful contrast for the character of Albany, who, though he is also associated with Goneril, manages to break free of her influence, and exemplify many of the qualities of the Early Modern courtier as described in the conduct books.
The Third Group of Courtiers

The third group of courtiers is comprised of four characters at the lower end of the social spectrum: the Knight and Servants 1, 2, and 3. All of these characters, in spite of their humble social stations, exhibit a firm sense of identity and a strong service ethic which is characteristic of the Early Modern period. They also provide a stark contrast to Oswald, in that they dare to think and operate according to their own moral codes, even at the greatest personal risk. These characters have not been given names by the playwright, which indicates their relative insignificance within the social structure. However, the fact that they make moral judgments regarding their social superiors and act on these judgments is a strong indication that protocol at every level of society can no longer be universally enforced. All four characters are well aware of the consequences of their actions, but proceed in the manner of men who can only live with themselves if they are true to their convictions. This independence indicates a sense of self and a level of personal development which reflect the humanist values embedded in the conduct books. Therefore, we can assume with confidence that these characters exhibit values of the Early Modern period. The Knight also functions according to his personal moral code, which is an indication of Erasmus’s teachings. However, in The Education of a Christian Prince, the underlying assumption is that all of the king’s subjects will want to be loyal to him. Erasmus does not make allowances for a subject who must serve more than one authority; subjects must choose which regent to follow, and pay the price for it. Erasmian principles can be applied in a limited fashion here, as the situation is far more complex than the idealistic vision he describes in his conduct book.
The behavior of these lower class characters in *King Lear* in the play can also be interpreted as a strong criticism of King James’s stance that the orders of the king must be obeyed whatever the character of the monarch and the effects of his actions. Moreover, the fact that three of Cornwall’s servants work together against him and Regan marks a significant social movement which cannot be quelled by royal decrees or even threats of annihilation.

*The Knight*

The Knight acts as a courtier in that he attempts to protect Lear and to defend him and his honor when he feels that the monarch is being disrespected by Goneril as well as by their attendants.

"My lord, I know not what the matter is; but to my judgment your Highness is not entertain'd with that ceremonious affection as you were wont. There's a great abatement of kindness appears as well in the general dependants as in the Duke himself also. And your daughter (1.4.49-53)."

In this situation, the Knight exhibits qualities of Erasmus’s prince in “that he is rational, has keen judgment, is clear thinking and circumspect; that he is sound in his advice, just, sensible, mindful of religious matters, with a thought to the affairs of men…” (171). The way in which the Knight presents his ideas to Lear is delicate and respectful, indicating a level of personal cultivation which reflects the ways of Castiglione’s courtier: “let him consider wel what the thing is he doth or speaketh, …and so let him apply himselfe discreetly… to whatsoever he mindeth to doe or speake (95).

In addressing the King in this way, the knight risks Lear’s displeasure, but he also puts himself in danger as well, for if any of Goneril’s attendants had heard him, he would
have been punished. Erasmus treats this issue as well: “for so much does he want to be of real help to his people, without thought of recompense, that if necessary he would not hesitate to look out for their welfare at great risk to himself; who considers his wealth to lie in the advantages of his country…” (162) and by extension the king of that country. It is for all these reasons that the Knight, in just a few short passages, shows that he merits the title of Early Modern courtier.

Servant 1

In certain ways, Servant 1 behaves more like an Early Modern courtier than many members of the nobility in the play. In Cornwall’s court, social classes appear to form rigid lines, the crossing of which can never be tolerated. However, when Cornwall is in the process of torturing Gloucester, this servant makes an heroic effort to influence Cornwall, whose ways he has known since childhood. Here, Servant 1 is playing the role of Castiglione’s courtier in the most perilous circumstances.

The ende therfore of a perfect Courtier (wherof hitherto nothinge hath bine spoken) I beleave is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies enfourme him francklye of the trueth of everie matter meete for him to understand… (260-261)

In the most direct, yet eloquent manner, this servant crosses all social boundaries and speaks out for justice as Erasmus does to the future prince when he commands him to “do violence to no one” (154); he also demands that the prince act in a way that is “mild, peaceful, lenient...just, [and] humane” (171). Servant 1 courageously opposes both Cornwall and Regan, and denounces their barbarous act. In doing so, he speaks to them as equals:
Servant 1. Hold your hand, my lord!
I have serv'd you ever since I was a child;
But better service have I never done you
Than now to bid you hold.

Regan. How now, you dog?

Servant 1. If you did wear a beard upon your chin,
I'd shake it on this quarrel.

Regan. What do you mean?

Duke of Cornwall. My villain! (3.7.69-76)

What is really remarkable about this servant is that in his dying moments, he encourages Gloucester to retaliate against his attackers: “O, I am slain! My lord, you have one eye left
To see some mischief on him. O!” (3.7.78-79).

Thus Servant 1 shows his willingness to risk everything for the cause of justice. In this way, he shows the strength, sense of purpose, and moral rectitude Castiglione desires for his courtier when faces with a situation such as this:

And whan he knoweth his minde is bent to commit any thinge unseemlie for him, to be bould to stande with him in it, and to take courage after an honest sort at the favour which he hath gotten him throughge his good qualities, to disswade him from everie ill pourpose, and to set him in the waye of vertue. (260-261)

Erasmus speaks even more frankly about the consequences an honest courtier confronts in circumstance which require that he put himself into grave danger to uphold his principles:

“Surely virtue is its own reward. It is the duty of a good prince to consider the welfare of his people, even at the cost of his own life if need be (149). Erasmus also writes that the prince must... “transform the morals and character of his subjects” (157), implying that
the prince will set the moral standard. In this situation, however, it is apparent that the servant has formed his own values and is capable of acting on them, knowing full well that this action will result in his own death.

_Servants 2 and 3_

What is really astonishing is that there are even more fine courtiers among the servants in Cornwall's household. Servants 2 and 3 meet the standards of the Early Modern courtier for both comment on the moral status of Cornwall and Regan. They denounce both of these noble-born leaders and express the fact that their behavior has a bad influence on the court and the nation, demonstrating what Erasmus calls the "requisite kingly qualities of wisdom, justice..." (140).

Servant 2. I'll never care what wickedness I do,  
If this man come to good.

Servant 3. If she live long,  
And in the end meet the old course of death,  
Women will all turn monsters (3.7.96-98Q).

They also contradict the orders of Cornwall and Regan by making plans to help Gloucester by enlisting the aid of Tom O'Bedlam and by preparing a remedy for Gloucester's wounds.

Servant 2. Let's follow the old Earl, and get the bedlam  
To lead him where he would. His roguish madness  
Allows itself to anything.

Servant 3. Go thou. I'll fetch some flax and whites of eggs  
To apply to his bleeding face. Now heaven help him! (3.7.100-105Q).

These two characters exemplify the counsel of Erasmus in these actions as he writes that the prince should behave as one "sent by the God above to help the affairs of mortals by looking out and caring for everyone and everything..." (161). Their choice to oppose the
intentions of Regan and Cornwall is also a form of departure from their service, a subject which Castiglione treats in the following passage:

If his chaunce be to serve a Prince of so ill a nature, that by longe custome is grown in use with vices...For in this case he ought to forsake his service, least he beare the blame of his Lordes yll practices, or feele the hartgreefe that all good men have which serve the wicked. (300-301)

The courage and good will of these unacknowledged Early Modern courtiers is matched by Gloucester’s tenant, the Old Man, the fourth member of this group.

*Old Man*

In the first scene of the fourth act, The Old Man speaks to Gloucester whom he has apparently found wandering around his former estate. It is rather sad and shocking that Gloucester apparently does not know his tenant, but the Old Man appears not to be affronted by this fact: “O my good lord/I have been your tenant, and your father's tenant,/ These fourscore years” (4.1.13-15). He shows deep concern for Gloucester, which echoes the qualities of Castiglione’s courtier: “the self same respect and reverence they woulde have to his will, as they have to the laws” (285). When Gloucester attempts to dismiss him, the Old Man, loyal courtier that he is, objects:

*Earl of Gloucester.* Away, get thee away! Good friend, be gone.
Thy comforts can do me no good at all
Thee they may hurt.

*Old Man.* You cannot see your way. ; (4.1.16-18)

Finally, in a beautiful inversion of the paradigm of the wealthy nobleman and his servant, Gloucester then humbly, and even beseechingly asks his tenant if he will bring some clothing for Poor Tom.

*Earl of Gloucester.* ...If for my sake
Thou wilt o'ertake us hence a mile or twain
I' th' way toward Dover, do it for ancient love;
And bring some covering for this naked soul,
Who I'll entreat to lead me. (4.1.42-46)

To this pathetic entreaty, the Old Man, aware as he is of the danger to himself which is involved, replies with the most earnest good will and sincerity: “I'll bring him the best ‘parel that I have,/ Come on't what will” (4.1. 50-51). Erasmus writes that it is ridiculous... for one adorned with gems, gold, the royal purple, attended by courtiers, possessing all the other marks of honor, wax images and statues, wealth that clearly is not his, to be so far superior to all because of them, and yet in the light of real goodness of spirit to be found inferior to many born from the very dregs of society. (150).

The old man, in his humility and simplicity demonstrates genuine nobility and many of the qualities of the ideal courtier in a very short space of time. Though he has nothing to gain and much to lose by assisting Gloucester, he, true to Erasmus’s teachings “[l]et[s] the thought of honor win” (155). The Old Man further exhibits qualities of Erasmus’s prince in that he shows “more than a paternal spirit toward everyone, [and] holds the life of each individual dearer than his own…”(163).

In sum, though these characters appear to hold little social or political power, the force of their convictions, their social skills, and their courage qualify them all as excellent examples of Early Modern courtiership.

The Fourth Group of Courtiers

The fourth class of character contains only one personage: Albany. He is unique in his supporting status in the play’s structure in that he embodies the most Early Modern qualities of all the characters in this supporting group of courtiers. He shows the moral sensibilities of Erasmus from the beginning of the play. After a slow start in the first act,
he exhibits a sophistication and a control of language which reflect Castiglione’s influence. In the last two acts, he also displays an authority, a decisiveness, and an ability to adapt which provides a reflection of Machiavelli’s counsel. His development as a leader in the last two acts is quite remarkable, and though his resolve dissipates in the last lines of the play, he still proves himself to be an excellent if imperfect example of Early Modern courtiership.

Albany

Albany’s speech and behavior in the first act hardly reveals a character destined for leadership. Erasmus states that “In navigation the wheel is not given to him who surpasses his fellows in birth, wealth, or appearance, but rather to him who excels in his skill as a navigator, in his alertness, and in his dependability” (140). However, Albany appears not to understand how Lear’s court functions (1.4.223), nor can he keep up with the chain of events (1.4.235), (1.4.259). In this act, he still harbors illusions about his wife’s character (1.4.273-274), and he is unwilling to take a stand as the action unfolds (1.4.291), (1.4.308-309), (1.4.311).

Albany does not appear onstage during the following two acts, but when he reappears in Act IV, he behaves in a much more decisive and forceful manner. First, he tells Goneril what he thinks of her. He employs the kind of rhetoric in the following speech that indicates a level of education and intellectual development which Erasmus describes as the sign of a philosopher “one who casts aside the false pseudo-realities and with open mind seeks and follows the truth” (150).

Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;
Filths savour but themselves. What have you done?
Tigers, not daughters, what have you perform'd?
A father, and a gracious aged man,
Whose reverence even the head-lugg'd bear would lick,
Most barbarous, most degenerate, have you madded.
Could my good brother suffer you to do it?
A man, a prince, by him so benefited!
If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep (4.2.35-45).

Later in the act, when the Gentleman arrives to tell him the news that Gloucester’s eyes have been taken by Cornwall, and that Edmund has informed against his father, Albany finally vows to avenge this crime.

Gloucester, I live
To thank thee for the love thou show'dst the King,
And to revenge thine eyes (4.2.63-65).

This is another indication that Albany is growing in strength and conviction and that he begins to resemble the prince Erasmus describes in *The Education of a Christian Prince*: “he works hard, accomplishes much, is deeply concerned for those over whom he rules and is their protector; that he is given to acts of kindness and slowly moved to vengeance; that he is true, constant, unbending, prone to the side of justice…” (171).

In act five, when he meets Regan and Edmund, Albany reveals that he knows how to dissemble. Machiavelli suggests that “if times and affairs change, [the prince] is ruined if he does not change his course of action” (141); instead of confronting Regan and Edmund for their crime with his habitual frankness, Albany speaks to them of political concerns, which proves that he is learning to respond to the turns of fortune in the appropriate way (5.1.22-27).
When the disguised Edgar appears with the letters which incriminate Edmund, though Albany does not know him, and though he appears to be a person of low status, Albany takes the opportunity to learn from him (5.3.27-36). In this case, Albany acts on the principle of responding to an opportunity to receive information which may help his cause, as Erasmus advises in this passage: “It is the part of those who are closely associated with the prince to give him counsel that is seasonable, appropriate, and friendly. It will be well for the prince to pardon those whose counsel is crudely given, so that there may be no example to deter his good counselors from their duty” (203). The value of this advice is proven very quickly, for in accepting Edgar’s assistance, he saves his own life, and promotes the preservation of the nation as well.

As the play’s action progresses, there is increasing evidence that Albany’s leadership is becoming more powerful. In Act V scene 3, Edmund has led the army to victory, and makes the executive decision to have Cordelia and Lear led away, planning to have them murdered. Albany reminds him that he has overstepped his bounds, as it is Albany who is in command. In this instance he follows Machiavelli’s statement that “a wise prince, when he has the opportunity, ought with craft to foster some animosity against himself, so that, having crushed it, his renown may rise higher” (119-120).

Another incident which reveals Albany’s strength is the scene when Regan orders the drum to strike to signal that she has made Edmund her consort. Here, Albany acts quickly and appropriately; he reminds Edmund of his inferior social status and also accuses Edmund of treason (5.3.73-88). In this moment of crisis, Albany shows the influence of Castiglione who writes that the courtier should, “in every thing that he hath to do or to speake, if it be possible, lette him come alwaies provided and thinke on it
beefore hande, showyng notwithstanding, the whole to bee done ex tempore, and at the first sight” (130). Clearly, Albany is becoming more and more accustomed to his role as a ruler, for he also displays a surprising show of wit and irony which also bespeak an unexpected level of sophistication in his character:

For your claim, fair sister,
I bar it in the interest of my wife.
'Tis she is subcontracted to this lord,
And I, her husband, contradict your banes.
If you will marry, make your loves to me;
My lady is bespoke. (5.3.77-82)

When Albany throws down the gauntlet, challenging Edmund to a duel, the outcome of which will prove Edmund’s treason, (5.3.86-89) it becomes apparent how confident and courageous he has become.

In a shrewd move to undermine Edmund’s courage, Albany reminds him that all the forces have taken their leave, and that Edmund will have no seconds. (5.3.97-99) After Edmund is defeated, Albany firmly and confidently confronts Goneril, who runs from the scene (5.3.147-148). All of these decisive actions prepare the audience to believe that Albany might, in fact, be capable of ruling the nation. This character also shows a reassuring proof of his sincerity when, after Edgar defeats Edgar and reveals his identity, he addresses Edgar in this way: “I must embrace thee./Let sorrow split my heart if ever I /Did hate thee, or thy father!” (5.3.167-168) Here, he illustrates Castiglione’s principle that the courtier should “ alwaies do hys beste to fellowshippe himselfe with menne of estimation that are noble and knowen to bee good…” (120)

Though the audience’s belief in Albany’s abilities may begin to grow, the play is not over yet. Albany then asks Edgar to share the course of events since Edgar’s banishment, and when Edgar relates the circumstances of his care for Gloucester, and his
subsequent death, Albany begins to show signs of emotional wear; he asks Edgar to end his story, as he, Albany, cannot hold back his tears (5.3.193-195). Erasmus warns that "[the prince’s mind] must be divested of all private emotions. He who is carrying on the offices of the state must give his attention to nothing but that" (208).

When Albany hears the news of the deaths of Goneril and Regan, he appears to regain his composure (5.3.203), but when Kent appears and asks to see Lear, Albany realizes that he has become distracted, “Great thing of us forgot!” (5.3.210). In the ensuing effort to save Lear and Cordelia, he fails to regain his equilibrium, for he must rely on Edgar for the management of the plan (5.3.221-225). When Lear emerges with the deceased Cordelia in his arms, Albany appears to have calmed himself; he makes the honorable and respectful gesture of bestowing absolute power upon Lear once more. In this case, he does not follow the dictum of Machiavelli, which states that “the family of their former lord [should be] extinguished” (11), but chooses instead Castiglione’s suggestion that he should show that he is showing “the reverence and respecte” that Lear deserves (106). After Lear’s demise, he passes the crown to both Kent and Edgar, who have proven their loyalty to Lear and to the nation, which may present a surprise to some spectators. Erasmus, however, explains Albany’s decision in his statements that “There are certain moral defects of nature which can be corrected by training and care... it would be a serious matter for the state to be ruined while the prince is learning... (187).

Albany’s transformation in the fourth and fifth acts is remarkable, but as the play progresses, we see that the number of dramatic events has taken its toll on his psyche. In the end, Albany has done his best to enforce justice, but it becomes clear to him that he is not the stuff that kings are made of. Though he displays the characteristics of
Castigione’s refined courtier, Erasmus’s morally upright and justice-minded prince, and even Machiavelli’s forceful and decisive planner, but he lacks the emotional control, the concentration, and the unrelenting focus which the monarch requires.

Section Four: Conclusion

It important to provide an historical, political and social background for Edmund and Edgar for a number of reasons. First of all, without understanding the considerations of the social status of second sons and the lower gentry, and illegitimate children, it is very easy to demonize Edmund. However, when we view Edmund in the context of a very large group of the socially disenfranchised, it is much easier to understand his character. Without the use of the conduct books, it is too simple to come to the conclusion that Edgar is "the good son" and that his being made king of England has meant that justice has prevailed at the end of the play. If we apply the standards of the conduct books to the speech and actions of both characters, we discover that Edgar deceives and dissembles just as much as Edmund does. Edmund may lie, manipulate, and murder those who stand in the way of his ascent to power, but so does Edgar. As the first son of a landed earl, Edgar has received more recognition and support from both Lear and Gloucester than Edmund has. However, a close look at the action of the play shows that, although he shows love and concern for both of them, Edgar abandons both Lear and Gloucester in order to pursue a course which will cause him to reclaim the status and power which he has lost.

I discussed fourteen other characters in King Lear who hold the rank of official court members, or who behave in such a way which would classify them as courtiers. In
this section, I showed that the first group of courtiers who attempt to adhere primarily to the standards of Erasmus, are relatively ineffectual in their influence of Lear. I conclude that their behavior in this environment are not only not effective, but that they are sometimes harmful to the monarch and are damaging to the well-being of the nation. The second group of courtiers tend to follow some of the counsels of Machiavelli. This group is also ineffective. One of the chief reasons for this is that though it seems that they form alliances, they do not actually invest in their relationships emotionally. The third group of courtiers, because of their social standing, has limited power, but the members of this group are very effective in the actions they take, because they operate from a sense of justice and possess deep commitment to the monarch and to their social superiors.

Albany, for his part, displays the most characteristics of the Early Modern courtier of the fourteen characters. This character gradually displays more and more competence as a leader as the action unfolds. However, he lacks the perseverance, the presence of mind, and the emotional control which the king of England must possess.

It has been important to introduce all the courtiers in the play and show the ways in which they have adhered (or not) to the rules of the conduct books because their paths show, in various ways, the outcome of their respective strategies. The discussion of Albany is of particular importance because he appears to have benefitted from status, title, education and moral upbringing as each of Gloucester's sons has he appears to follow all the rules. At this point, we are able to compare both his strengths and weaknesses to theirs and can better see how both brothers apply the counsels of the conduct books more effectively to their actions.
In the next two chapters, I will reveal the ways in which both Edmund and Edgar surpass Albany's Early Modern qualities, thus making them far more suited to lead the nation.
Chapter Three: Edmund’s Rise and Fall

*Introduction:*

The subject of Edmund’s rise to power and his eventual fall and demise is a complex one; in order to analyze it thoroughly, we must first look at his place in society and in the family. Edmund is a character who represents not just one individual but an entire class of frustrated and rambunctious younger sons and lesser gentry who, because of the existing social structure, stand no chance to inherit land, title, or position at court. No matter how gifted, capable, or intellectually cultivated these men were, they were unlikely to live well-connected, prosperous, and fulfilling lives unless they unceremoniously broke with moral and societal strictures and took advantage of every possible opportunity to gain favor at court.

Edmund’s illegitimate status lessens his chances at success even further. Though Kent asserts that Edmund is a “proper” (1.1.15) man, and though Edmund is an intelligent and capable individual, his prospects appear dim, especially considering the fact that Gloucester has no compunction about advertising the circumstances of Edmund’s unwanted conception and birth in great detail to court members who might otherwise be willing to promote Edmund’s career. Thus Edmund does not turn to his radical approach to advancement on a whim; he views his aggressive strategy as the only way to escape the prison which society has created for men in similar situations to his own.

In this chapter, I will conduct my analysis of Edmund’s ascent and decline in two parts. First, I will review what scholars have previously written about him, and will respond to their opinions with several of my own. In the second part of the chapter, I will
support my stance by choosing Edmund’s most important scenes and citing the various aspects of his speech and behavior which correspond to the teachings in the conduct books of Castiglione, Machiavelli and Erasmus. What I intend to show is that Edmund’s trajectory reflects different aspects of all three conduct books at various times; sometimes one author’s influence is apparent in a particular scene, but at other times, the impulse from more than one source can be discerned. My point here is that there are apparently many facets to Edmund’s path which have not been previously examined, and which certainly bear consideration by the scholarly community. I will end this chapter by returning to the arguments of other scholars, revisiting the evidence in the play I have found to refute them, and then drawing my own conclusions about the motivations and influences which drive Edmund’s initial success and ultimate failure in his quest.

**Previous Scholarly Opinions**

In the past, scholars have tended to agree that though Edmund is a highly attractive character both physically and intellectually, he is largely an unsympathetic one. G. Wilson Knight has this to say about Gloucester’s younger son:

Edmund is the natural son of Gloucester. His birth symbolizes his condition: and he is animal-like, both in grace of body and absence of sympathy. He is beautiful with nature’s bounty and even compasses intellect and courtly manners; he lacks one thing–unselfishness, sympathy. He is purely selfish, soulless, and, in this respect, bestial.

...He is unprincipled, cruel, and selfish; but he has fascination. He has a kind of sex-appeal about him.” (200)

Knight also calls him “the wittiest and most attractive of villains” (225). Coleridge sees Edmund somewhat differently: “From the first drawing up of the curtain Edmund has stood before us in the united strength and beauty of earliest manhood” (Coleridge n. pag.). David Bevington’s assessment of Edmund is that he is “a Machiavellian, an atheist,
and Epicurean—everything inimical to traditional Elizabethan ideals of order” (518).

Andrew Dillon writes that Edmund is “largely lost to any sympathetic consideration” (Dillon 82).

Because of scholars’ animosity toward this character, they have strenuously objected to the playwright’s choice of having Edmund attempt to make restitution after he is mortally wounded. Edmund’s change of heart in his last moments certainly irked Derek Cohen, who writes that the playwright has created in Edmund “a man who has shown the deepest disregard for other human beings” (Cohen 385). So when Edmund “suddenly...pays an astonishing homage to virtue,” Cohen finds this turn of events difficult to accept and comprehend; he calls Edmund’s effort in the direction of restitution “a hideous absurdity, a cruelly meaningless and completely inconsequential gesture” (385). Matthews writes that A.C. Bradley asserts that Shakespeare was “exceptionally careless” (25) regarding the probability of events which transpire at the end of the play. Harley Granville-Barker calls Edmund’s change of heart part of the play’s “ignoble end” (208). Robert B. Heilman opines that Edmund is just “enjoying his own death scene” (247).

My answer to the first set of comments is that the examination of the counsel offered by Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Erasmus in their conduct books provides the tools to understand both Edmund and Edgar. The teachings in these books allow us to shift the view of Edmund from the beautiful, selfish, soulless, and bestial villain, to a much more nuanced view of this character. I argue that Edmund, as an illegitimate second son, merely behaves in a way which will promote his career as a courtier. Edmund does form the significant part of his strategy in the shape of Machiavelli’s
prince, in that he displays no interest in the details of the well-being of the nation; his focus is on personal and professional advancement. However, he is not strictly Machiavellian; he couples the use of Machiavellian techniques with Castiglione's recommended refined social skills, rhetoric and *sprezzatura*, which causes his efforts at self-promotion to be extremely effective. What Edmund conceals for the greater part of the play is his loving and trusting Erasmian nature. He has a deep desire to love and be loved; he wishes to be a cooperative member of a society which has essentially invalidated him and prevented him from growing to fruition because of his illegitimate status and his place as second son.

As far as critics’ dissatisfaction with the revelation of Edmund’s desire for restitution at the end of the play is concerned, I argue that there are a few marked indications throughout the play which point to the conflict between Edmund’s ambitious practices and his emotional and spiritual life. These signs, which I treat in my discussion, make the ending not only plausible, but also perfectly logical and even predictable. My discussion of Edmund’s path will point out the sections in the play in which Edmund reveals his struggle in maintaining his persona as an amoral and emotionally detached politician. I posit that these sections in the play, which reveal his inner conflict, prepare the audience for the disintegration of his persona, his confession, and his effort at restitution in the play’s final scene.

**Discussion of Edmund’s Rise and Fall**

There are six key sections which mark Edmund’s rise and fall: Edmund’s soliloquy in act one, scene two, his persuasion of Gloucester of Edgar’s treachery, informing Cornwall of Gloucester’s assistance of Lear, the scenes of engagement with
Goneril and Regan, his distraction of Albany, and the play’s final scene where he, mortally wounded, transitions from the Machiavellian model enhanced by Castiglione’s suave rhetoric to the embodiment of Erasmus’s philosophy of love and truth. In discussing Edmund’s actions in these instances and relating them to principles in all three conduct books, I will show that Edmund is not just a Machiavellian-style villain, as a number of critics have assumed. I will provide details which illustrate the fact that, though a great deal of his speech and behavior is motivated by Machiavelli’s methods, Edmund also displays the qualities of Castiglione’s cultivated, intelligent, and sophisticated courtier, as well as the sensitivity, humility, emotional courage, and willingness to love of Erasmus’s prince.

In chapter two, I noted that Whigham asserts that the conduct books were taught at university along with other academic subjects and that university students “saw that there was a direct link between intellectual cultivation, leadership, and the concept of national destiny” (Whigham 13). Gloucester says that Edmund has been away nine years, so the assumption is that he has been studying at university. He has been led to expect that the cultivation of his intellect and his leadership abilities would lead him to a position of importance at court. I also noted that Whigham states that this university educated courtier had to cope with the fact that the humanist expectations he learned at university did not mesh with the realities of the court life he faced when he completed his studies. So when Edmund finds himself at King Lear’s palace and experiences the mortification of his father’s introduction of him to the Earl of Kent, he comes to the realization that all of his hopes and dreams for a distinguished position at court can never be realized. His father, the Earl of Gloucester, is the one who must introduce him to other
members of court and broadcasts the shameful circumstances of Edmund’s birth, thus paving the way to his son’s social and professional oblivion. If Edmund declines to take matters into his own hands with alacrity, none of his dreams will ever be realized; the rest of his life will be most likely spent in the shadows, and he will be unrecognized for the great soul and the great leader he was born to be.

First Scene: Edmund’s Nature Soliloquy

In Edmund’s soliloquy in the second scene in the first act, he explains his need to take action to better his situation and in so doing justifies the necessity to jettison all social and moral considerations.

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! (1.2.1-23)

There is much evidence for Edmund’s mastery of the material in Machiavelli, Castiglione, and even Erasmus in this speech. The opening lines of the soliloquy are:
"Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law/ My services are bound" (1.2.1-2). This phrase can be interpreted to mean that his despair has driven him to abandon both Christianity and social laws which both condemn him to a marginal role in the community, and which force him to figuratively apologize for his existence with every breath.

The next few lines in this speech point to the fact that he is one of Erasmus’s genuine philosophers because he “casts aside the false pseudo-realities and with open mind seeks and follows the truth” (150). The truth here is that Edmund is correct that society needlessly and cruelly punishes younger sons and illegitimate children. Edmund’s outrage is such that he calls on his exceptional personal gifts: his appearance, his ability to control language, his psychological and political awareness, and his leadership skills to carve out a place for himself in the world. In order to do this, he must adopt Machiavelli’s approach. His genius inspires him to couple this with the fine charm, discernment, and finesse of Castiglione’s courtier. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that this violent disappointment and disillusionment could only elicit such a vehement response from an extremely truth-loving idealistic, philosophical, energetic, and gifted individual who is the model for Erasmus’s prince.

Edmund is completely isolated in his status as an illegitimate son—there is no one to understand him or to assist him. Gloucester has publicly blamed Edmund and his mother for the shameful circumstances of Edmund’s birth, and therefore has distanced himself emotionally from Edmund, and there is no influential mentor in sight who can help him to navigate this social handicap. It is thus fitting that Edmund expresses his true feelings in a soliloquy, for a dialogue with any other character is impossible. In this solitary reflection, Edmund calls upon the goddess of Nature to assist him. There is deep
emotion here. His decision to break from social norms and to bind himself to nature’s law comes on the heels of his public humiliation and rejection by his father. He realizes that if he is to become the man he can be, realizing all of his talents and abilities, he must rely only on himself.

Edmund also reveals his considerable intellectual prowess in this scene. He analyzes the fact that there is no reason for him to be considered inferior to his brother, and that the structures set up by society to favor one class of men over another are constructed on false assumptions. Here he reflects Erasmus’s statement that reason is the mind in its “finest element” (176). In his decision to seize Edgar’s land, he has come to the conclusion that by living a just life and abiding by rules of society he will never be able to grow and prosper. This sentiment is echoed by Machiavelli, who writes that “a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil” (83). I argue that this speech marks the moment that Edmund makes his statement that if he continues to live the virtuous life as the loving son and brother, he will never advance at court, he will never inherit or become the recipient of money, and he will never acquire any land. He has decided that he will live by nature’s law, seizing opportunities to feed himself, to grow, and prosper as opportunities present themselves without giving thought to social laws or to the well-being of others.

Second Scene: Edmund’s Persuasion of Gloucester

Edmund wastes no time in applying his new strategy. Immediately following this speech he produces a letter that he has composed in Edgar’s hand which implicates his brother in the conception of a plot to murder Gloucester. In this instance, Edmund applies
another concept described by Machiavelli in *The Prince*: that of responding to *fortuna* with *virtu*': "Therefore it is necessary for him to have a mind ready to turn itself accordingly as the winds and variations of fortune force it, yet... not to diverge from the good if he can avoid doing so, but, if compelled, then to know how to set about it" (99).

Edmund proves that he knows how to go about it: in this rhetorical and theatrical tour de force, Edmund displays his ability to take full advantage of this opportunity to further his own interests. By staging his little drama at a time of political unrest in the kingdom, Edmund further unbalances Gloucester's already shaky sense of security. In pretending to conceal the letter, he provokes Gloucester, the paranoid micromanager, to demand to see it. Through his hesitation and skillfully worded defense of his brother, Edmund provides Gloucester with the opportunity to denounce his brother. By offering to spy on Edgar and report his findings back to Gloucester, Edmund then very smoothly pretends to join forces with Gloucester regarding Edgar. In the expert construction and execution of this scene, Edmund applies not only the counsel of Machiavelli, but also one of the major principles stated in *The Book of the Courtier*: "The good use of speach ...ariseth of men that have wytte, and with learninge and practishe have gotten a good judgement, and with it consent and agree to receave the woordes that they think good, which are knowen by a certaine naturall judgement, and not by art or anye maner rule" (59).

*Third Scene: Edmund's Persuasion of Cornwall*

The audience knows that Edmund has betrayed his brother by fabricating evidence which marks Edgar as a traitor; this act requires us to feel a little less sorry for the disadvantaged Edmund. However, Edmund's cold-hearted infidelity to Gloucester is
perhaps even more shocking and revolting than his betrayal of Edgar. Edmund’s speech below indicates that he does definitely harbor some very hard feelings toward his father:

This courtesy, forbid thee, shall the Duke
Instantly know, and of that letter too.
This seems a fair deserving, and must draw me
That which my father loses—no less than all.
The younger rises when the old doth fall. (3.3.18-22)

Treason was usually punished by death, and the fact that Edmund says that his implication of Gloucester “seems a fair deserving” could refer to the act of treason, but it could also reflect the murderous rage which Edmund feels toward his father. Erasmus warns against acting in anger when he writes that “private emotions [such as] reproachful anger, love for your wife, hatred of an enemy… urge [the prince] to do what is not right” (155). So here we see that Edmund moves further toward the amoral stance of Machiavelli, and further away from Erasmus’s lofty ethical foundations.

Edmund proves himself to be a very skillful social climber. He is careful to document the “facts” he presents to those he wishes to persuade; he produces yet another letter in the next scene, one which reveals Gloucester’s alleged treason. In making an outward show of being torn between family loyalty and duty toward the state, Edmund creates a convincing scenario for the Duke of Cornwall. By appearing to assist Cornwall in the protection of his rule, Edmund embodies Castiglione’s counsel:

I have the Courtyer to frame himselfe, though by nature he were not enclined to it: so that whansoever his lorde looketh upon him, he may think in his minde that he hath to talke with him of a matter that he will be glad to heare. The which shal come to passe if there bee a good judgement in him to understand what pleaseth his prince and a wit and wisedom to know how to applie it, and a bent wil to make him pleased with the thing which perchappes by nature should displease him…(106)
Edmund also adheres to Machiavelli’s precepts in this instance, in that he promotes his own interests while pretending to serve those of Cornwall. Fortunately for Edmund, the Duke of Cornwall is quite willing to believe his story, even without the verification of the contents of the letter. The Duke of Cornwall quickly draws his own conclusions about Gloucester’s character, which further supports Edmund’s cause for professional advancement.

Edmund. If the matter of this paper be certain, you have mighty business in hand.

Duke of Cornwall. True or false, it hath made thee Earl of Gloucester. Seek out where thy father is, that he may be ready for our apprehension. (3.5.14-16)

Edmund’s success in his rise to power is nothing short of phenomenal. In his ability to understand the susceptibilities of those around him, he exemplifies the teachings of Castiglione, who offers this wisdom for those who wish to advance in their profession:

...he shall discreetly observe the times, and in his suite shall be for honest and reasonable matters, and he shall so frame hys suite, in leavinge oute those pointes that he shall knowe wil trouble him, and in making easie after a comely sort the lettes, that his Lord wil evermore graunt it him...(107)

Cornwall, who is very much taken with his new protégé, offers to replace Gloucester as a parent to Edmund. This is further evidence that Edmund has won his confidence and has placed himself in line for the highest favors: “I will lay trust upon thee, and thou shalt find a dearer father in my love” (3.5.21-22). Edmund has thus quickly achieved the goal for Castiglione’s “perfect Courtier...[which is] to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withal...” (261).
However, Castiglione also warns the courtier not to continue to serve a prince who has proven himself to be wicked and cruel when he writes: “But if it fell to oure Courtyers lott to serve one that wer vitious and wycked, assoone as heknoweth it, let him forsake hym, least he taste of the bytter peine that all good menne feel that serve the wicked” (112). Machiavelli would actually commend Edmund’s actions in ingratiating himself with Cornwall. In the first act, Edmund aspired to take over Edgar’s title as Earl of Gloucester at a future time, but when the chance presented itself, he positioned himself so that he could frame Gloucester as a traitor and acquire the title immediately.

Machiavelli counsels the ambitious prince in the following way:

Let him act like the clever archers who, designing to hit the mark which yet appears too far distant, and knowing the limits to which the strength of their bow attains, take aim much higher than the mark, not to reach by their strength or arrow to so great a height, but to be able with the aid of so high an aim to hit the mark they wish to reach. (27)

When he had planned in the first act to take the family title and land from Edgar, Edmund made no mention of the early extinguishing of Gloucester’s life so that he could assume the family benefits more quickly. Yet, when the chance presents itself for him to gather all these bounties from his father, Edmund seizes it eagerly.

Although this scene can certainly be read as evidence of Edmund’s pure Machiavellianism, a closer examination reveals important ambiguities in his attitude towards his father and the radical consequences of the action he is contemplating. I posit that Edmund finds it necessary to talk himself into committing an action which will certainly result in his father’s certain dire punishment and probable death. “This seems a fair deserving and must draw me that which my father loses” could be interpreted as Edmund’s exacting revenge for his blighted life, but it could also be interpreted as an
expression of Edmund’s ambivalence regarding the radical nature of this betrayal of his father. Either way, if Edgar has to rehearse this train of thought with himself, this is proof that he is experiencing at least a modicum of conflict regarding the drastic move he is about to make.

In act three, scene five, Edmund does present the evidence of Gloucester’s treason to Cornwall. After swearing revenge, Cornwall, without requiring further proof of Edmund’s allegation, names Edmund Earl of Gloucester. After Cornwall’s exit, Edmund tells himself that he will check to see if Gloucester is helping Lear so that Edmund can prove Gloucester’s treachery to Cornwall, but then his thoughts take a different turn: “...I will persever in my course of loyalty, /though the conflict be sore between that and my blood” (3.6.18-20). This sentence is a clear indication that Edmund is not completely sure that he wants to sacrifice Gloucester to promote his professional ambitions. I argue that this is proof that Edmund is not convinced in heart and mind that his course of action is a proper one. I posit that this quote, as well as the previous one, indicate that Edmund harbors feelings of love for his father and that this conflict between his desire for wealth and power and the feelings he holds for his father are evidence that Edmund does not embody the Machiavellian principles exclusively.

Fourth Scene: The Persuasions of Goneril and Regan

Though Edmund may not be thoroughly convinced that he is doing the right thing in sacrificing his father to survive and thrive, the later scenes with Goneril and Regan show that he appears not to be disturbed by the fact that they both assume that he will be the consort of each one. In the scenes with both sisters, Edmund further proves his ability to respond to fortuna with virtu.
The following scene with Goneril displays his ability to ride the waves of people’s assumptions about him. Here we see that Goneril uses many words to give him orders and forbids him to speak. In contrast to the elaborate long speeches he uses in the persuasion of Gloucester, Edmund wisely complies with her wishes with only one line.

Goneril. [to Edmund] Then shall you go no further.  
It is the cowish terror of his spirit,  
That dares not undertake. He'll not feel wrongs  
Which tie him to an answer. Our wishes on the way  
May prove effects. Back, Edmund, to my brother.  
Hasten his musters and conduct his pow'rs.  
I must change arms at home and give the distaff  
Into my husband's hands. This trusty servant  
Shall pass between us. Ere long you are like to hear  
(If you dare venture in your own behalf)  
A mistress's command. Wear this. [Gives a favour.]  
Spare speech.  
Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,  
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air.  
Conceive, and fare thee well.

Edmund. Yours in the ranks of death!

Goneril. My most dear Gloucester!  
O, the difference of man and man!  
To thee a woman's services are due;  
My fool usurps my body. (4.2.12-28)

While Goneril believes that she is holds more power than Edmund at the moment of this exchange, he is actually beating her at her own game: he allows Goneril to project all of her desires upon him. In so doing, Edmund proves Machiavelli’s assertion that “he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived” (98). Edmund also applies Castiglione’s advice to the courtier on this matter which would have him
consider well what the thing is he doth or speaketh, the place where it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it, his age, his profession, the end where it tendeth, and the means that may bring him to it: and so let him apply himself discreetly with these advertisementes to whatsoever he mindeth to doe or speake. (95)

The persuasion of Regan falls in precisely the same pattern; Edmund appeases Regan with very few words and lulls her into a false sense of hope and security. Edmund’s responses to Regan’s remarks and queries are elegant, perfectly chosen, and completely misleading.

Regan. Our sister's man is certainly miscarried.

Edmund. Tis to be doubted, madam.

Regan. Now, sweet lord,
You know the goodness I intend upon you.
Tell me- but truly- but then speak the truth-
Do you not love my sister?

Edmund. In honour'd love.

Regan. But have you never found my brother's way
To the forfended place?

Edmund. That thought abuses you.

Regan. I am doubtful that you have been conjunct
And bosom'd with her, as far as we call hers.

Edmund. No, by mine honour, madam.

Regan. I never shall endure her. Dear my lord,
Be not familiar with her.

Edmund. Fear me not.
She and the Duke her husband!
Enter, with Drum and Colours, Albany, Goneril, Soldiers. (5.1.5-18)

Here is the opportunity for Edmund to employ more of Castiglione’s suggestions that the courtier speak “with fitte maners and gestures, which...consiste in certain mocions of al
the body not affected nor forced, but tempred with a manerly countenance...that may
gave a grace and accord with the words, and... signify also with gestures the extent and
affection of the speaker (56). Castiglione notes, however, that the words themselves are
the most important element: “But al these thinges wer in vain and of smal accomplte yf
the sentences expressed by the wordes should not be fair, witty, subtil, fine and grave
according to the mater (56).

Fifth Scene: The Exchanges with Albany

This is a very significant scene for Edmund in a number of ways. Here we see that
Edmund actually breaks his ties with both Machiavelli and Castiglione, which is
definitely a signal that Edmund has lost his footing on the path to power. In the first scene
of the fifth act, Edmund, who has just lead the English army to victory over France, tells
an officer:

Know of the Duke if his last purpose hold,
Or whether since he is advis'd by aught
To change the course. He's full of alteration
And self-reproving. Bring his constant pleasure. (5.1.1-4)

In his public criticism of the reigning sovereign, Edmund reveals a crucial weakness
which has not been previously evident. In this instance his speech contradicts the
Castiglione’s advice that the courtier always “…governeth himselfe with... good
judgement” (130). Although Edmund must, at this point, feel relatively confident that
Goneril will soon see to Albany’s disappearance, his open disrespect of the nation’s ruler
can only be considered a serious breach of protocol and a grave tactical error.

Machiavelli informs the prince that “it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own
to know how to do wrong…” (83). Certainly, Machiavelli would not consider Edmund’s
plans to assume Albany’s position objectionable, but for Edmund to reveal his contempt
for a king who still holds power would hardly be considered by Machiavelli as an appropriate strategy.

There is further evidence later in this last act that Edmund’s force is showing signs of weakness. First, Albany commends Edmund upon his skill as a military leader, but then he gets to the point: he wants Edmund to hand over Lear and Cordelia so that he, Albany, can ensure their safety. Edmund, behaves as if he and Albany are equals at this point; instead of complying with Albany’s wish immediately, he presents logical arguments for his reasons to sequester them until an unspecified future moment when the decision can be made regarding their fate. Albany objects to his stance and clarifies Edmund’s relationship to him: Edmund is to him a subject, and not a brother. (5.3.52-53). For the first time in the play, Edmund fails to achieve the end of the courtier as Castiglione describes it: “perfect Courtier...[which is] to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities whiche these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withal...” (261). However, instead of pressing his own side further with Albany, Edmund wisely allows Regan to take his side against Albany.

Regan. That's as we list to grace him.
Methinks our pleasure might have been demanded
Ere you had spoke so far. (5.3.54-56)

What follows here is a speech by Regan pledging herself, all her earthly goods, her patrimony, and all her power to Edmund. When Goneril asks if she is about to enjoy him, Albany reminds her that the decision is not in her power to make. Instead of remaining silent, which would have been the most prudent course, Edmund once again disrespects Albany, but this time to his face, when he reminds the king that he has no power to decide this matter:
Goneril. Mean you to enjoy him?

Duke of Albany. The let-alone lies not in your good will.

Edmund. Nor in thine, lord. (5.3.72-73)

Castiglione cautions that the courtier should never “debate with their Lordes,” which he calls “truly an hateful matter” (106). He writes further that the courtier “shall not be yll tunged, and especiallye againste his superiours,” (106) a sin which Edmund has clearly committed here. Albany, who will not be bested this time, aims for the jugular with a rapid retort regarding Edmund’s social status: “Half-blooded fellow, yes” (5.3.73). Regan attempts to make her will into law by having the drum strike, but Albany pre-empts her by choosing this moment to accuse Edmund of treason.

In this scene, then, there are three critical instances which illustrate the fact that Edmund is not the cool, disciplined, and successful courtier we have seen in the earlier parts of the play. He has taken leave of the counsel offered by Machiavelli and Castiglione regarding judgment and strategy in that he has disparaged Albany’s leadership abilities in public, he has failed to persuade Albany in a situation where they have a difference of opinion, and he has flaunted his relationship with Regan and his potential position of power when he should have remained silent.

**Sixth Scene: The Combat with Edgar and the Desire for Restitution**

This scene reveals the further disintegration of Edmund’s strategy to become king, and this process also culminates in the fatal error of judgment which leads to Edmund’s demise. Edmund appears to have lost touch with the fact that he is still in a precarious position regarding Albany, who still has absolute power over his fate. His
response to Albany’s accusation of treason is one of vehemence which borders on bravado:

Edmund. There's my exchange *[throws down a glove]*.

What in the world
he is
That names me traitor, villain-like he lies.
Call by thy trumpet. He that dares approach,
On him, on you, who not? I will maintain
My truth and honour firmly. (5.3.91-95)

The elegant, persuasive speeches of the previous acts are nowhere in evidence here. Edmund, formerly the shrewdest of strategists, neglects to inquire about the details of this accusation. His powers of negotiation seem to have vanished as well; he makes no effort to construct arguments to support his loyalty to the nation by risking his life in leading the English army to victory against the French invaders. Instead, in a reckless display of braggadocio, he offers to take on all comers including, including Albany himself.

The next short exchange is a sure indication that Edmund has become completely unhinged, for in this moment of crisis, he crudely mocks Albany, the king, in the presence of all bystanders:

Duke of Albany. A herald, ho!

Edmund. A herald, ho, a herald! (5.3.100-101Q)

The audience has been accustomed to seeing Edmund as the one who controls the action, and who makes sure that he is always one step ahead of the other characters in their planning and plotting. This time, surprisingly, we see that it is the unusually confident Albany, who has taken the upper hand:
Trust to thy single virtue; for thy soldiers,  
All levied in my name, have in my name  
Took their discharge. (5.3.97-99)

Edmund appears to be unfazed by this information, and even appears to be ridiculing the entire process. Albany leads the proceedings by his command that a trumpet should sound the first time:

Albany....Come hither, herald. Let the trumpet sound,  
And read out this.

Captain. Sound, trumpet! A trumpet sounds.

The herald then reads the challenge to Edmund as a public statement:

Herald. [reads] 'If any man of quality or degree within the lists of the army will maintain upon Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester, that he is a manifold traitor, let him appear by the third sound of the trumpet. He is bold in his defence.' (5.100-105)

Edmund, who should remain silent, calls for the first trumpet to sound after it has already sounded.

Edmund. Sound! First trumpet. (5.3.113 Q)

Albany and the herald ignore his insolence, and continue with the proceedings. Edgar appears in disguise and firmly proclaims his challenge in a dignified manner. After listening to Edgar’s statement, Edmund responds in his own thoughtless and scornful manner.

In wisdom I should ask thy name;  
But since thy outside looks so fair and warlike,  
And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes,  
What safe and nicely I might well delay  
By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn.  
Back do I toss those treasons to thy head;  
With the hell-hated lie o'erwhelm thy heart;  
Which- for they yet glance by and scarcely bruise-  
This sword of mine shall give them instant way  
Where they shall rest for ever. Trumpets, speak! (5.3.134-145)
Edmund’s disdain for the proceedings are made clear again in the speech above. Edgar can only be dressed in the patched-together costume of the best clothing of the Old Man and some of Oswald’s attire; none of these pieces are likely to fit him. He is also wearing a makeshift mask, which most likely distorts his speech; he may or may not be wearing shoes. When Edmund says that his appearance looks “so fair and warlike” (5.3.3291), he is not only making fun of his clothing but he is expressing the highest disrespect for his challenger. When Edmund says “And that thy tongue some say of breeding breathes” (5.3.133), what he is inferring is that he, Edmund, would not be one of them. So Edmund is addressing his challenger by saying that such an absurdly dressed opponent with a risible accent will immediately be defeated so that all accusations of treachery against him will be silenced for all time.

Though Edmund states that he knows that he does not need to accept the challenge, he chooses to do so, thereby violating one of Castiglione’s important precepts for the courtier:

Neither let him runne rashely to these combattes, but when he muste needes to save his estimation withall: for beside the greate daunger that is in the doubtfull lotte, hee that goeth headlonge to these thynges and without urgent cause, deserveth verye great blame, although his chaunce bee good. (39)

Castiglione counsels further that the courtier must not enter into a contest with a man of the lower class: “it is wel done to abstaine from it, at the leastwise in the presence of many, because if he overcome, his gaine is small, and his losse in being overcome very great” (98). Edmund’s behavior throughout this scene indicates that he has relinquished his ties with the suave, careful, modest, balanced, and self-controlled courtier described by Castiglione. Edmund’s decision to enter into a duel with the unknown opponent
provides yet another example of his altered state, an indication that Edmund is hurtling toward a violent end.

Machiavelli’s prince is also required to maintain detachment and self-control. He must also exercise good judgment, and must only take action which is necessary to further his advancement. Edmund’s reckless approach in the conflicts in this scene shows that he is not working according to Machiavelli’s counsel in this matter. In his previous conflict with Albany, Edmund was willing to take the path of least resistance, merely allowing matters to evolve with the confidence of a man who believes that he cannot be conquered, which follows Machiavelli’s rule of managing fortuna with virtu. Instead of refusing to duel with the stranger, Edmund accepts his challenge, though he knows that this is not part of court protocol: “What safe and nicely I might well delay/ By rule of knighthood, I disdain and spurn./ Back do I toss those treasons to thy head…”(5.3.135-137). This is yet a further indication that Edmund has separated himself from the teachings of the conduct books. Edmund is haggard and battle-weary; if he were absolutely convinced of the need to take up the affront to his honor, he could certainly defer this challenge to another time and place where he would be supported by seconds.

Edmund and Edgar engage in combat, and Edmund not only loses the contest, but sustains a mortal wound. When the fight ceases, and so does Edmund’s dissembling:

What you have charg'd me with, that have I done,  
And more, much more. The time will bring it out.  
'Tis past, and so am I. But what art thou  
That hast this fortune on me? If thou'rt noble,  
I do forgive thee. (5.3.152-156)

Edmund admits to his lawless behavior, and in so doing, supports the common weal, which aligns him with Erasmus’s “good, wise, and upright prince [who] is nothing else
than a sort of living law” (221). In his expression of forgiveness to his slayer, he also embodies Erasmus’s statement about the ideal prince: “let him love, who would be loved…” (221).

When a gentleman reveals that both Regan and Goneril have expired, Edmund, who is also on the verge of death, expresses a wry irony: “I was contracted to them both./All three/Now marry in an instant” (5.3.200-201). This self-disparaging remark brings an unusual twist to Castiglione’s counsel that the courtier “…laugh, dalie, jest, and daunce, yet in such wise that he maie always declare himselfe to bee wittie and discrete…” (42). The defeated Edmund continues in the same ironic and self-deprecating vein: “Yet Edmund was belov'd./ The one the other poisoned for my sake,/ And after slew herself” (5.3.214-216).

However, as the end draws near, Edmund becomes more grave:

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,  
Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send  
(Be brief in't) to the castle; for my writ  
Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia.  
Nay, send in time. (5.3.217-221)

Here, he follows Erasmus’s command to the prince: “Make your power serve you to this end, that you can be of as much assistance as you want to be. But no, your desire in this respect should always exceed your means! On the other hand, always cause less hurt than you could have caused” (158). Since his soliloquy in the first act, Edmund has not shown his true feelings to anyone, and now, at the point of death, he becomes completely transparent. The Machiavellian agenda is utterly forgotten, and Castiglione’s patina of elegance and sophistication have fallen away completely. In contrast to Cornwall, whose last words expressed his hard heart and lack of respect, Edmund repents of his
wrongdoing and tries to make restitution. In the following speech, he confesses his plot to eliminate Lear and Cordelia:

Edmund. He hath commission from thy wife and me
To hang Cordelia in the prison and
To lay the blame upon her own despair
That she fordid herself. (5.3.227-230)

This impulse reflects Erasmus’s thought for the prince: “…he want(s) to be of real help to his people, without thought of recompense… (162). Nothing can benefit Edmund at this point; his end is very near. His desire stems only from the goodness in his heart and the very powerful desire to make amends. It is in these last moments that we are able to catch a glimpse of the person Edmund might have been as described by Erasmus: “A beneficent prince...a living likeness of God... His goodness makes him want to help all…” (157). It is, alas, too late for Edmund to make a positive difference in the lives of others on the earthly plane. Just moments after his last speech, the Captain enters the stage and announces Edmund’s death. Albany dismisses the news with one hasty line: “That's but a trifle here” (5.3.270). Thus the brilliant, talented, capable, and soulful Edmund passes from the world, alone and unmourned.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Edmund shows elements of all three courtiers conduct books. He most consistently follows Machiavelli’s instructions, but, until the final act, he also always displays the politeness, grace, and calm demeanor of Castiglione’s courtier. Because the social system does not favor him, he takes matters into his own hands and creates a fictional reality. Because of his *sprezzatura* and his ability to negotiate *fortuna* with *virtu*, he is nearly able to reach the summit of success.
Considering all these skills, it is very difficult to imagine why Edmund fails to achieve his goal.

I posit that the reason for Edmund’s lack of success is that he realizes, even before the combat with Edgar that, even if he becomes king, he will still be illegitimate, he will still be alone, and he will still not be satisfied. I argue that Edmund is very deeply emotionally wounded by Gloucester’s inappropriate joking regarding his conception and birth. I posit also that Edgar is also really stung when Albany addresses him as “half-blooded fellow” (5.3.73). My thinking is that Edmund realizes that even after he assumes the throne, he will still be the second son, the spare of “the heir and the spare,” and the eternal mal aime. Why else would he, after a leading a long, bloody struggle with French forces, choose to take up a duel with an unknown man of uncertain status to defend his honor? He possesses more powers of persuasion than all of the other courtiers (save Edgar) put together—why does he not try to negotiate this duel? He says that he knows that the knightly rules do not require him to fight. He chooses to do so anyway and is mortally wounded. Goneril, on perceiving that her ticket out of a suffocating marriage is about to go his ways, reproaches him bitterly and asserts also that protocol did not require him to defend his honor. Considering all these elements, plus the fact that he uses black humor when he hears about the deaths of Regan and Goneril about their marrying him and loving him, I can only conclude that Edmund dies of despair before he enters the combat with Edgar.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, G. Wilson Knight’s comments that Edmund is “selfish, soulless, … bestial,… and cruel” (200). I believe that my analysis of Edmund’s family and social, and professional situation, in light of the conduct books for the prince
and the courtier has proven that Edmund is much more complicated than this description would suggest. Through my discussion, I have shown that Edmund is not a personage with an evil nature, but a gifted and intelligent one who struggles with emotional and social disadvantages in the way that any intelligent, well-educated and sophisticated individual might do in the same situation.

Bevington’s assessment of Edmund as “a Machiavellian, and an atheist” (518) I believe is not entirely wrong, but, as my discussion strongly indicates, Edmund does not adopt these two modes of thought as random choices—his familial and social circumstances demand that he take a stand against the injustices which he faces. My discussion has also supported the idea that Edmund’s actions also reflect Castiglione and Erasmus’s work and that his behavior shows many layers of subtlety which are not reflected in the words “Machiavellian” and “atheist.”

I heartily disagree with Dillon’s assumption that the audience would feel no sympathy for Edmund. I believe that Edmund’s situation as the unwanted and unloved son who has no prospects would be understood and pitied by many audience members, especially considering the fact that he does repent and that he does make an effort to make restitution before he expires. In response to Cohen’s observation that Edmund’s confession is “a hideous absurdity” (385), I would like to point out the ambiguity Edmund expresses regarding his attitude to Gloucester in the fifth scene of the third act, as well as the breakdown of his Machiavellian techniques at the beginning of the final act of the play. I argue that these two important scenes signal another layer of Edmund’s psychological makeup which then becomes apparent after he is mortally wounded by Edgar. Heilman’s claim that Edmund “is just enjoying his own death scene” (247) when
he tries to save Lear and Cordelia I believe is unfounded, considering the sincerity Edmund expresses in his exchange of charity with Edgar, the full confession of his plans to eliminate Lear and Cordelia, and his focused efforts to organize their rescue in his dying moments.

As to the reason that Edmund does not become king, I can offer these reflections: Edmund was certainly intelligent enough to be king and he most assuredly knew all the protocols. He knew how to work all the angles, and he showed considerable talents as a leader. My assessment is that Edmund wanted to get to be king, but he did not want to be king. What he really desired were love and social validation and he thought that being king would bring him these things. When he realized that this was not going to happen, then he gave up the struggle. The price was too great anyway. Before his death, he repents and tries to do some good because he realizes that his life, or at least this part of his life, has been misspent. In his last moments he deeply desires to undo some of the wrongs he has committed. So I posit that even though it appears as if Edmund was very comfortable in his role as a courtier and knew how to say and do whatever it took to convince those around him that his fabrications were true, he actually suffered a great deal under the strain of pretending. For Edmund, death was a better option than Shouldering the burden of deception and posturing indefinitely.

Perhaps the study of Edgar and his journey in the following chapter will offer more insights into Edmund’s rise and fall.
Chapter Four: Edgar’s Fall and Rise

Introduction

Edgar’s family and social situation is completely different from that of Edmund. While Edmund must not only deal with his fate as the younger brother who will not inherit, he must also learn to cope with the stigma of his status as a bastard. Though he does not treat the subject of illegitimacy in his study, Whigham does describe in detail the restlessness of Edmund’s ambitious tribe; the resentment and envy they must have felt toward the first-born sons must have been considerable. Edmund’s status as an illegitimate second son must have seemed to him to be an overwhelming barrier not just to prosperity, but to survival. While Edmund and his ilk were required to struggle mightily to acquire all the accomplishments and qualities to enable them to be recognized by influential members of court, Edgar, because of a fortunate accident of birth, was expected to make no particular effort to impress anyone. His future as the Earl of Gloucester, replete with the land and fortune that the title entailed, was completely secure.

This situation, especially seen from Edmund’s standpoint, is completely revolting. The two brothers appear to have nearly equal talents, skills and abilities in the areas of emotional control, sense of appropriateness, power of expression in language, political awareness, and leadership. They both seem to hold every attribute necessary to lead the country. Edmund even seems to hold a significant edge over Edgar in at least two ways; he appears to have a much better grasp of court politics, especially in the first two acts, and he shows himself to be an excellent military man. I posit, however, that Edgar’s overwhelming advantage stems from the fact that he has been raised to believe that he holds an important place in both the family and the nation. This sense of belonging
translates into a deep love for his father, a profound attachment to Lear, a fundamental connection to other people, and a much stronger relationship to society and to the nation than Edmund can ever hope to experience.

What I intend to show in this chapter is that there is abundant evidence throughout the play for Edgar’s aptitude for the kingship, and that though he and Edmund are nearly equal in abilities and talents, Edgar employs his powers with better strategy and more self-control, especially in the final act. I argue that Edgar’s assumption of the crown at the end of the play is not merely an afterthought on the part of the playwright; it is, in fact, the logical conclusion to a painstaking character construction, one which exemplifies many of the recommended qualities and practices in the conduct books of Castiglione, Machiavelli and Erasmus. I posit further that Edgar’s success can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that he reinforces his Erasmian paternalistic world view with practical Machiavellian aspects by the close of the play.

Previous Scholar’s Opinions

In spite the fact that Edgar shows considerable ingenuity, intelligence, courage, concern for loved ones, and knowledge of political strategy, some earlier Shakespearean scholars have written that they have found the character of Edgar rather uninteresting and not terribly believable as a character. For example, A.C. Bradley writes in Book XIII of Shakespearean Tragedy that of the four “good” characters, Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, and the Fool, “Edgar excites the least enthusiasm...” (244). Leo Kirschbaum argues that Edgar is “a function in King Lear, not a real character... [he is] merely a dramatic device.” He argues that each of Edgar’s roles serves the dramatist’s ends, but that Edgar is not “a mimetic unity” (9). Russell Peck writes that Edgar commands “only a small portion of
our sympathy compared to Lear” (236), but he also calls Edgar “the second most central figure in the play” (219). Andrew Dillon call Edgar “a mystery” (Dillon 84); William Carroll takes this remark further by asserting that critics “will never be able to explain everything about Edgar—the mystery is too great in this case” (Carroll 426).

My response to the assertion that Edgar is not interesting is that Edgar’s assumption of the role of a babbling madman and a number of laborers playing various roles and speaking different regional accents can hardly be called uninteresting. His deft ability to humor Lear, and his patient, imaginative, and highly unconventional methods to keep Gloucester alive surely cannot have been overlooked by these critics. His resourcefulness toward the end of the play can only be seen as remarkable; he defeats Oswald armed only with a club, he audaciously approaches Albany with the incriminating letter found on Oswald’s person, and he dares to challenge his brother to a duel which will decide both their personal fates and the destiny of the nation. Surely such a character who accomplishes so much can be said to be not only interesting, but to embody the mimetic unity of Shakespeare’s world as well.

While the focus of the play must remain on Lear, I argue that the audience’s attention also needs to be trained on Edgar more and more as the play progresses, for during the play’s action, he shows himself as the only character who is capable of managing all of the extremely demanding parts of the responsibilities of the monarch. It is clear after the second act that Lear will never be able to lead the nation again, and that someone else will inherit the throne. The subject of the play not only concerns the fate of King Lear, but also the destiny of England; therefore, after Lear dies, there absolutely
must be a character left alive on stage on whom the audience may pin its hopes and aspirations for the renewal of the nation.

As far as Edgar’s mysterious nature is concerned, in my discussion of six of his most important scenes in the play, I plan to explain the key elements of Edgar’s fall and rise to power by showing the ways that his speech and behavior are influenced by each of the three conduct book authors in these scenes. This discussion will shed light on the mystery of this character and will explain the reasons for Edgar’s fall from his secure position at court (so full is he of Erasmian virtue) and his slow and painful rise to the kingship through his progressively more consistent applications of Machiavelli’s core values enhanced and embellished by Castiglionian refinements.

**Discussion of Edgar’s Fall and Rise**

There are six key scenes that serve as the signposts of Edgar’s major transitions in the play. The first one is Edgar’s soliloquy in the third scene of the second act, when Edgar describes his plans to disguise himself as a madman. The second is his education of Lear as Tom O’Bedlam, Lear’s philosopher. The third important scene is his preservation of the life of Gloucester, first at Dover Cliff, and then his protection of his father from the ambitious Oswald. The fourth important scene is his brief but crucial exchange with Albany, convincing him to read the letter that proves Edmund’s treason. The fifth critical scene is his challenge and duel with Edmund, and the sixth and final important scene is his closing speech, which ends the play. In discussing Edgar’s choices in all of these scenes, and in relating the scenes to the counsel provided in each of the three conduct books, I will show each of the stages of Edgar’s metamorphosis. In his untried, early stage, Erasmian principles dominate his actions, but various crises in the
drama gradually cause him to utilize more and more of Machiavelli’s methods while employing Castiglione’s principles of refinement and persuasion. By the end of the play, his Erasmian core is still present, but the Machiavellian ideas dominate, though they are softened somewhat on the surface by Castiglione’s veneer of sophistication and refinement.

In the first act of the play, Edgar proves himself to be as innocent and naïve as Cordelia and Albany are. The speech he generates consists of short questions to Edmund and even shorter answers to Edmund’s queries. We cannot know Edgar well from his speech in this act. My assumption here is that Edgar has also returned from university or at the very least he has benefited from a humanist education. My assumption is also that he, like Edmund, has emerged from his formal education expecting to live his life according to humanist principles. He appears to love and trust both Edmund and his father, suspecting neither one of doing him any harm; he expects to be loved and trusted in return. In The Prince, Machiavelli expresses his disagreement with this assumption when he writes that “a man who wishes to act entirely upon his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil” (83). Edgar has the opportunity to understand that his assumptions have been incorrect very quickly, for Edmund’s plan to unseat him unfolds quite rapidly and efficiently.

First Scene: Edgar’s Tom O’Bedlam Soliloquy

In his first really significant scene, Edgar reveals his creativity and his ability to make fast decisions, as well as his courage and daring. He has disguised himself as one of the poorest members of the nation. His knowledge of this level of society is more than apparent; he eloquently describes the hideous plight of these people: their physical
description, their behavior, and their treatment by their fellow citizens. Here we see signs of his resourcefulness and wisdom in choosing to hide himself in this fashion. However, we also see that he is keenly aware of the way that the weakest members of the society are forced to live.

...Whiles I may scape,
I will preserve myself; and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man,
Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheepcotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity. 'Poor Turlygod! poor Tom!'
That's something yet! Edgar I nothing am. Exit. (2.2.158-179)

There are two quotations from the conduct books that apply to this phase of Edgar’s journey: the first is Castiglione’s injunction to the courtier that he wear handsome clothing: his courtier must “delite in modest Precisenesse” (117). We see here that Edgar, in a life and death situation, has cast off this superficial attribute of the courtier and has instead chosen to apply a more general and practical counsel offered by Machiavelli who opines: “fortune being changeful and mankind steadfast in their ways, so long as the two are in agreement men are successful, but unsuccessful when they fall out” (143). Instead of adhering to his former lifestyle, Edgar has chosen to adapt to fortune, as Machiavelli advises. Machiavelli states further that he considers that “it is better to be adventurous
than cautious” (143), and Edgar shows that his choice of disguise here is nothing if not adventurous.

What is also noteworthy here is that this soliloquy reveals that Edgar, unlike Edmund, appears to have no axe to grind; he does not lament, blame others, seek revenge, or make plans to wrest power from anyone else. He does not suspect Edmund of betraying him, and he does not denounce Gloucester for assuming that he has planned his murder. Edgar simply makes the decision to live like the poorest people in the kingdom and to experience life as they do. In uttering the phrase, “Edgar I nothing am” (2.2.178), he conveys to the audience that he is fully aware that he will never return to the life he has known and will never again assume the comfortable identity of the cossetted first son who stood to inherit land, fortune, and title. In freeing himself from the impulse to wreak vengeance upon those who are responsible for his fall, Edgar follows Erasmus’s dictum for the prince, which states that the prince should not indulge in “private emotions such as... reproachful anger, ... [or] hatred of an enemy,... [for these] urge [the prince] to do what is not right and what is not [beneficial] to the welfare of the state...” (155).

Second Scene: Edgar’s Education of Lear

In Act III scene 4, which is the next significant scene in which Edgar appears, we witness his exemplary performance as Tom O’Bedlam. Edgar’s assumption of this role is all the more astonishing considering that he is a nobleman who has found himself in the most stressful position imaginable. The fact that Edgar is able to imitate a person of the lowest social rank illustrates a kind of ease that Castiglione never imagined when he writes: “let him laugh, dalie, jest, and daunce, yet in such wise that he maie alwayes declare himselfe to bee wittie and discrete, and everie thynge that he doeth or speaketh,
let him doe it with a grace” (42). In this instance, Edgar is playing a role which will allow him to save his own life, but which also allows him to keep watch over the king and keep him informed of the state of national security as well.

Who gives anything to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow and halters in his pew, set ratsbane by his porridge, made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting horse over four-inch'd bridges, to course his own shadow for a traitor. Bless thy five wits! Tom's acold. O, do de, do de, do de. Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking! Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes. There could I have him now- and there- and there again- and there! (3.4.48-59)

To the surprise of the characters and the audience as well, Edgar as Tom O’Bedlam manages to captivate the attention of the truculent and obstreperous Lear. Edgar has defied all of the advice offered by Castiglione to the courtier to make himself pleasing to the prince through beautiful appearance, agreeable manners, and refined speech. However, in spite of this fact, Edgar has achieved the ultimate purpose of the courtier, which Castiglione defines as the “purchase...[of] the good will and favor of the Prince...that he may breake his minde to him, and always enfourme him francklye of the trueth of everie matter mee te for him to understande, without fear or perill to displease him [and]. ...to set him in the waye of virtue” (261).

Edgar's genius as a courtier and a counselor to the king is further on display when, later in this same scene, he responds to Lear's question regarding his identity in the following manner:

A servingman, proud in heart and mind; that curl'd my hair, wore gloves in my cap; serv'd the lust of my mistress' heart and
did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven; one that slept in the contriving of lust, and wak'd to do it. Wine lov'd I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramour'd the Turk. False of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey...(3.4.77-84)

In this instance, Edgar employs Erasmus’s principle that “the life of the prince is mirrored in the morals of his people” (157). If the state of the court and the morals of the courtier reflect the Lear’s own spiritual life, then this speech is a strong indication of the sorry condition of Lear’s own internal housekeeping. Edgar, having sensed this, continues with his courtier-as-madman’s homily to Lear by creating for him, in Tom’s code, a conduct book of his own:

Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman. Keep thy foot out of brothel, thy hand out of placket, thy pen from lender's book, and defy the foul fiend. (3.4.85-89)

Edgar thus seizes his opportunity to continue Lear’s education. It is not only the poorest people who suffer in Lear’s kingdom, but the more privileged members of society as well. Though employment at the court might be thought of as the highest goal a person might achieve, corruption and immoral behavior is rife in that milieu to the extent that it drives its members to madness. First he relates all the activities that occupy court members, which have nothing to do with the promotion of the welfare of state: swearing, gambling, drinking, and debauchery. Tom reveals own his dishonesty and lack of faith, and compares himself and other court members to animals.

Lest Lear emerge from the situation without a perfect understanding of the plight of the poor, Edgar as Tom further describes the plight of the legions of impoverished individuals.
Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the todpole, the wall-newt and the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats cow-dung for sallets, swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog, drinks the green mantle of the standing pool; who is whipp'd from tithing to tithing, and stock-punish'd and imprison'd; who hath had three suits to his back, six shirts to his body, horse to ride, and weapons to wear; But mice and rats, and such small deer, Have been Tom's food for seven long year. Beware my follower. (3.4.1115-124)

He relates their continuous suffering from the plague of mad thoughts, their diet of pond scum, rodents, and excrement, and their abominable treatment by government officials and fellow citizens. Here is one more piece of evidence that Edgar is fit to rule. He knows the intimate details not only of court life, but of the daily existence of the poorest and weakest members of the nation. He is not only aware of their condition, but he also indicates to Lear that the government and the society it is meant to support do not assist people in this level of dependence, but actually persecute and punish them. In his instruction of Lear, Edgar reflects the Erasmian idea that

the laws should see in the main that no wrong is done any man, be he poor or rich, noble or commoner, servant or slave, official or private citizen. But they should lean more in the direction of leniency to the weaker, for the lot of those in the lower stations is more exposed to injuries (228)

In spite of his convincing impersonation of a madman, in the following scene, where Lear asks his assistance to put his daughters on trial, Edgar shows that he is fully possessed of his wits and that he understands the proceedings very well. He is well aware that the rage and hurt that Lear feels toward his daughters has propelled him toward madness. Edgar, though moved to tears by his apprehension of this horror, weeps in an
aside to the audience but maintains his equilibrium and his mad persona in front of the other characters.

Lear’s new understanding of his own behavior, his family, his kingdom, and his subjects cause Edgar to draw his own conclusions about the role of the kingship:

When we our betters see bearing our woes,
We scarcely think our miseries our foes.
Who alone suffers suffers most i’ th’ mind,
Leaving free things and happy shows behind;
But then the mind much sufferance doth o’erskip
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
How light and portable my pain seems now,
When that which makes me bend makes the King bow,
He childed as I fathered! Tom, away!
Mark the high noises, and thyself bewray
When false opinion, whose wrong thought defiles thee,
In thy just proof repeals and reconciles thee.
What will hap more to-night, safe scape the King!
Lurk, lurk. (3.6.92-105Q)

In this soliloquy, Edgar expresses the importance of the king’s knowledge of the life of the people, and how important it is for the monarch to concern himself with their well-being. He reveals his ideas about the concept of the nation and the manner in which mutual understanding and support between the king and his subjects makes the quality of life in that nation much richer and deeper. Throughout this speech he reflects the Erasmian ideas of the philosopher, who is not “one who is learned in the ways of dialectic or physics, but one who casts aside the false pseudo-realities and with open mind seeks and follows the truth” (150).
In his next significant scene, Edgar as Tom then proceeds to take up the yoke of his father’s guide and protector. When Gloucester asks if he knows the way to Dover, Edgar replies “Both stile and gate, horseway and footpath” (4.1.55). In doing so Edgar reveals that he might have followed Machiavelli’s advice to engage in the hunt “by which he accustoms his body to hardships, and learns something of the nature of localities, and gets to find out how the mountains rise, how the valleys open out, how the plains lie, and to understand the nature of rivers and marshes, and in all this to take the greatest care…” (80). Machiavelli goes on to explain that this knowledge is useful not only because the prince will learn to know his country, but because he will then “be better able to undertake its defence…” (80). By leading Gloucester by the arm, Edmund also shows that he is willing to perform the most humble tasks, but it also indicates that he bears no ill will toward Gloucester for his betrayal, which reflects one of Erasmus’s principles that “vengeance [is not] appropriate in a prince, who should be generous and magnanimous.” (232).

As the pair approach the cliffs of Dover, Edgar employs his powers of persuasion to convince his father that he has fallen from a cliff, but through a miracle, he has landed on the ground unhurt. While such an act involves deception, which Machiavelli condones in the following passage:

...our experience has been that those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to circumvent the intellect of men by craft, and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word....a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith... when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer...[b]ut it is necessary to know well how to disguise this characteristic, and to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men
are so simple, and so subject to present necessities, that he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived...(97).

There is a great deal of ambiguity woven into this situation. By manipulating Gloucester’s suicide attempt, Edgar is basically depriving his father of his rights to make decisions about his own life. Edgar has basically assumed the role of dominant spiritual advisor in this situation; he must be absolutely certain that his attitudes and assumptions are superior to Gloucester’s. He has taken the Erasmian role of father to an extreme. Without considering the fact that his father’s world has crumbled, and that he is blind, and that he is teetering on the brink of insanity with grief and regret, Edgar decides that his father must live. He goes to great lengths to ensure that Gloucester is persuaded that he actually has a chance to end his life. We, the audience, must cope with two competing reactions. We are touched that this young person is so convinced that every life must be lived to its natural end with heroic courage. We are also aghast that Edgar dares to make the decision to prolong the life of a man whose thoughts are a torment, and for whom every breath brings fresh suffering.

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

... Horrible steep.
Hark, do you hear the sea?

... Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes’ anguish.

... Y’are much deceived. In nothing I am chang’d
But in my garments.

... 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. Halfway down
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 yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish’d to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
That on th’ unnumb’red idle pebble chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I’ll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.

Give me your hand. You are now within a foot
Of th’ extreme verge. For all beneath the moon
Would I not leap upright.

Now fare ye well, good sir. (4.5.11-33)

We know from Edgar’s aside that his hope is that his father’s depression will be lifted through this ruse, and that Gloucester will regain the will to carry on with his life. However, Edgar’s decision to take his father’s power away from him at this crucial time indicates that he has moved away from Erasmus’s benevolent, sensitive, and kind father figure, and further toward Machiavelli’s dictatorial methods, which assume that those in power always make the correct decisions. Even though Edgar may believe that he has his father’s best interests at heart in this situation, he is still forcing Gloucester to conform to his own will, and not that of his father.

[aside]. Why I do trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.

Gone, sire, farewell.
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?
Ho you, sir! friend! Hear you, sir? Speak!-
Thus might he pass indeed. Yet he revives.
What are you, sir? (4.5.42-49)

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
So many fathom down precipitating,
Thou'dst shiver'd 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 is a miracle. Speak yet again. (4.5.49-55)

...  

From the dread summit of this chalky bourn.  
Look up a-height. The shrill-gorg'd lark so far  
Cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up. (4.5.57-59)

Edgar’s artful description of Gloucester’s fall reveals the ability to paint a living picture with words, which Castiglione describes as a quality which is very necessary for the courtier to possess. He writes that it “ariseth of men that have wytte, and with learninge and practise have gotten a good judgement, and with it consent and agree to receave the woordes that they think good, which are knowen by a certaine naturall judgement, and not by art or anye maner rule” (59). Castiglione goes on to say that a graceful and bright oration may break all the rules of grammar, but that this oration may “delite, and to the very sence of our eares it appeareth [it may] bringe a lief and a sweetenesse...” (59). Surely Edgar’s description of Gloucester’s miraculous fall is an example of this principle: it is delivered in dialect by a madman and in a form anything but poetic, in the traditional sense. It uses natural images (gossamer, feathers, lark, and an egg) and images of sea and shore (masts and chalky bourn). The language is anything but soft; rather, it is earthy, compelling, uplifting, and paternal. There is also a tenderness embedded in it, and an appropriateness to the situation which is described by Castiglione when he writes that the courtier, when he speaks or contemplates an action, “…let him consider wel ...the place wher it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it...(95). In any event, Edgar’s ruse is effective, for Gloucester, having failed at suicide, agrees to carry on, at least for the time being.
As Edgar is also playing the role of spiritual father in this situation, he conceives of a way to exonerate all his father’s guilt and shame associated with suicide. In creating yet another fabrication, Edgar apparently believes that he will imbue his father’s spirit with new hope. Though Edgar’s motivations might be commendable, the methods he employs to create these feelings in his father might appear clumsy, ill-advised, or highly immoral to the observer.

As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses
Horns whelk’d and wav’d like the enridged sea.
It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours,
Of men’s impossibility, have preserv’d thee. (4.5.69-74)

Thus, in tending to his father’s physical and spiritual life, Edgar resorts to perpetrating falsehoods. Fortunately, Machiavelli has seen to it that all the prince’s own sins are absolved: “it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity” (85). Machiavelli is careful not to name any particular wrong-doing, but continues with his reassurances to the prince that he should take action without feeling remorse:

...he need not make himself uneasy at incurring a reproach for those vices without which the state can only be saved with difficulty, for if everything is considered carefully, it will be found that something which looks like virtue, if followed, would be his ruin; whilst something else, which looks like vice, yet followed brings him security and prosperity. (85)

Later in this scene, Edgar again resorts to withholding the truth: when Gloucester asks him who he is, he replies: “A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows/ Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows/Am pregnant to good pity” (4.6.2836-2838). This decision on his part indicates that he is moving further and further away from the role of obedient son, and closer and closer to the role of political analyst and national
leader. Castiglione writes that the courtier must “purchase not the name of a liyar” (133). However, Edgar, who is presumably waiting for the right moment to prepare his father for the shocking news that he is Gloucester’s son, deceives his father once again.

Oswald bursts onto the scene at this point and threatens to murder Gloucester. Though Gloucester expresses eagerness to end his life, Edgar warns Oswald that he should run away. In the heaviest dialect, Edgar makes every effort to dissuade the armed Oswald from his purpose but to no avail. They fight and Edgar knocks him to the ground with his cudgel, proving that even with an inferior weapon, he answers Castiglione’s description of the courtier as being able to “shewe strength, lightnes, and quicknesse, and to have understandyng in all exercises of the bodie, that belonge to a man of warre...I thinke the chief oint is to handle well all kynde of weapon both for the footeman and horseman, and to know the vauntages in it” (40). In defending his father from the assailant, Edgar also follows Erasmus’s precept that “the incorrigible must be sacrificed by the law (just as a hopelessly incurable limb must be amputated) so that the sound part is not affected” (224).

After Oswald dies, Edgar inspects the letter that Oswald commanded him to deliver and finds that it contains proof of Edmund’s treachery. This action, and the ones which ensue because of it, display Edgar’s ability to respond to fortune with acts of virtu. Machiavelli writes about the necessity for the prince to be able to adapt to the changes and chances of life in this way, and notes that “a man is not often found sufficiently circumspect to know how to accommodate himself to changes in fortune...” (141).
Fourth Scene: The Persuasion of Albany

In his approach to Albany, Edgar uses but a few well-chosen words, which provide an example of Castiglione’s assertion that the courtier by “powringe [into the prince’s mind] through the most quiet waies [he may elicit] a vehement persuasion [so that the prince is] wholy most obedient to reason” (271).

If e’er your Grace had speech with man so poor,
Hear me one word.
Before you fight the battle, ope this letter
If you have a victory, let the trumpet sound.
For him that brought it. Wretched though I seem,
I can produce a champion that will prove
What is avouched there... (5.1.28-34)

In this scene, the Machiavellian element manifests itself in the fact that Edgar lies to Albany when Albany asks him to stay while he reads the letter. Edgar is careful here to keep his identity concealed, knowing that he can better serve the still-naïve and emotional Albany as an anonymous assistant. Edgar thus circumvents Albany’s official role as reigning monarch, and takes the reins into his own hands. As was true of his dealings with Lear and his father, Edgar shows in this situation, too, that he understands the limits of the person who has power over him. In all three cases, Edgar addresses these limits in appropriate ways, while maintaining his own security through disguise and by withholding sensitive information. These practices are at the heart of both the philosophies of Machiavelli and of Castiglione.

Fifth Scene: Edgar’s Confrontation with Edmund

Edgar’s powerful rhetoric is in evidence once again when he challenges Edmund. Here, Edgar shows his awareness that nothing short of a bold accusation of treachery will
provoke Edmund to physical combat. He strongly suspects that Edmund’s shaky sense of his own worthiness will provoke Edmund to override the considerations of protocol, despite Edmund’s exhaustion from the recent battle with French forces. Even though Edgar as the challenger is in a much weaker position as a masked stranger of uncertain status, he relies on his authentic noble accent and his beautifully crafted accusation to provide thrust to his challenge.

Draw thy sword,
That, if my speech offend a noble heart,
Thy arm may do thee justice. Here is mine.
Behold, it is the privilege of mine honours,
My oath, and my profession. I protest—
Maugre thy strength, youth, place and eminence,
Despite thy victor sword and fire-new fortune,
Thy valour and thy heart—thou art a traitor;
False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father;
Conspirant 'gainst this high illustrious prince;
And from th' extremest upward of thy head
To the descent and dust beneath thy foot,
A most toad-spotted traitor. Say thou 'no,'
This sword, this arm, and my best spirits are bent
To prove upon thy heart, whereto I speak,
Thou liest. (5.3.118-131)

Castiglione’s influence is much in evidence in this speech: the pillars of Edgar’s argument here are honor, oath, profession, and loyalty to the prince, all of which form the foundations of Castiglione’s courtier. Castiglione asserts that, in order to make his way in the world, the courtier must express himself in words which are “apt, chosen, clere, and wel applied...for very suche make the greatnes and gorgeousnes of an Oracion, so he that speaketh have a good judgement and heedfulnes withal, and the understanding to pike such as be of most proper significacion,...(56). Edgar’s power must thus be negotiated through appropriate language. Though Edgar has all the decisiveness and resolve of
Machiavelli’s leader at this point, he would never be able to ascend to power without his distinctly Castiglionian ability to manipulate language.

Though it would appear that these two influences might be enough to propel Edgar to the kingship, I argue here that Edgar is convinced that he is battling for truth, justice, and above all, for the honor, protection, and preservation of the nation and its people. This points to the most important difference between the two brothers: Edmund is struggling for himself and his own supremacy, and Edgar is fighting to preserve and protect a family line, a history of kingship, a nation of people he knows well, and a terrain which is extremely familiar to him. These factors are all found in Erasmus’s teachings to the prince, and form the heart of Edgar’s drive to achieve the highest position of power.

After Edgar’s victory, he and Edmund forgive each other, and Edgar behaves as detached as a judge in this matter. Then Albany provides Edgar with the opportunity to relate his heroic acts, a rhetorical feat that establishes Edgar as a multi-faceted and multi-talented hero, and that also creates a history of this time which contributes to the building of the nation.

**Sixth Scene: Edgar’s Closing Speech.**

In the last speech of the play, Edgar takes a quiet, stately, and measured tone, and forms his thoughts into two rhyming couplets, which indicate a distinct level of formality and control. These are four lines moving and somber, but they are also quite cryptic. Edgar says that the times are sad, and that people must express their feelings with words,
and not just mouth acceptable platitudes. Edgar himself, however, refrains from expressing his own feelings.

The weight of this sad time we must obey,
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest have borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5.3. 298-301)

Instead of referring to himself and his future as a monarch, he refers to the previous king and his court in a respectful and deferential manner. He alludes to the greatness of Lear, and that of his court. Without going into much detail, he modestly opines that the present administration, himself included, shall never meet the same level of challenge, or be remembered in quite the same way. This reverence and humility is completely befitting of the king who must show his connection to the past, to the idea of a unified kingdom, and to the efforts of the past king and his court. I posit here that Edgar, having assumed the throne, is already in the process of nation-building in that his speech creates part of the English national history which is characterized by a pride and dignity which will be maintained throughout his own reign.

Much criticism has been devoted to the subject of the ending of the play; many scholars have been disappointed in the playwright’s decision to make Edgar king, for they have found him a highly unsatisfactory replacement for Lear. This brings us to a discussion of the two different endings: in the Quarto version of the play, published in 1608, Albany delivers the final speech but in the Folio version of the play, published in 1623, it is assigned to Edgar. Some scholars believe that the Quarto and the Folio are actually two different plays. The Quarto has been determined by a number of scholars to have been taken from Shakespeare’s foul papers. The Folio is believed to reflect changes
made to the play as it was performed in Shakespeare’s theatre. (Carson n.pag.) In the Folio, Albany and Kent are weaker characters than they are in the Quarto, and Edgar comes across as a much stronger figure. I posit that the Folio holds a much stronger and more hopeful ending than the Quarto, in that Edgar, who has proven himself throughout the play to be a capable, alert, loyal, resourceful, loving, and stable character, will assume responsibility for the nation. Even the last words he utters in the play reflect the influence of Castiglione, who writes that the courtier must constantly concern himself with the appropriateness of everything he says and everything he does: “let him consider wel what the thing is he doth or speaketh, the place wher it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it, his age, his profession, the ende whereto it tendeth, and the meanes that may bring him to it” (95).

Conclusion

I conclude that there are a number of reasons that Edgar succeeds where Edmund fails. First, I posit that Edgar, through accident of birth, lands in a prime position for leadership. As the first legitimate son, he stands to inherit both land and title from his father. In addition to this fortunate situation, Edgar has also been given his name by King Lear, which establishes a deep connection between Edgar and the king on a personal level, but is a further confirmation of Edgar’s privilege and connection in English society. Unlike Edmund, who grows up with the understanding that he will not inherit, and who may or may not occupy a somewhat shadowy corner of court life, Edgar has known only security and a sense that he occupies and deserves an important place among his family and in the world.
This sense of assuredness and belonging manifests itself in many ways: first, he displays a remarkable maturity and capacity to preserve himself from the very beginning of the play; even after his fall from grace, he refrains from criticism, does not seek revenge, and appears to harbor no ill feelings toward those who have done him wrong. He formulates his plan to become a madman and then executes it, in spite of the hardship this entails. He encounters Lear, whom he loves, and he allows himself to feel his feelings for Lear, but he does not them interfere with his plan. He cooperates with others (Lear, Kent, the Fool) but does not reveal his identity to them, thereby protecting himself.

When he has a chance to speak with Lear, he becomes a perfect, if unconventional, model of the Castiglionian courtier in that he tries to tell Lear the truth about the kingdom in a way that Lear can understand. He meets Gloucester who has been blinded and rather than attempting to exact revenge, he assists him. He also acts as Gloucester's father (a reflection of Erasmus's paternalism) in that he guides him both physically and spiritually. He will not allow Gloucester to end his life, because he makes the decision for Gloucester that life is good, and that Gloucester's being alive is a miracle, and that Gloucester must respect his own life. He defends Gloucester against the assault of Oswald, and then uses material on the dead man's person to further his own cause. Following his pattern of interacting with other individuals with sincerity, he brings the incriminating letter which Oswald was carrying to him. Albany heeds the contents of the letter and cooperates with Edgar, whose identity he does not know.

Edgar, who must by this time be famished and exhausted, challenges Edmund to a duel. We must conclude here that Edgar wins this combat not only because he is skilled in the martial arts, but because he is completely convinced that he is in the right. I argue
that Edgar struggles for a much larger cause than his own; he fights for the right to lead the nation he knows well, and loves exceedingly. Throughout the play, there is proof of his knowledge of the every level of society from the highest aristocrat, to the lowest and most humble peasant. Edgar speaks everyone's language. Edmund appears to understand the court and its people and its mentality, but Edgar’s knowledge of England and its people appears to be comprehensive. Edgar’s all-inclusive grasp of the intricacies of the society makes him a prime example of this important facet of Erasmus’s description of the ideal ruler.

Edgar appears to operate from the idea of love for the nation. He is decisive, and he believes that he is in the right. While his actions appear to be inspired by Erasmus’s principles, he not only enforces them with the refinement, skill, and imagination of Castiglione’s courtier, but also by employing the amoral tactics of Machiavelli’s prince. It is well to note that the further Edgar progresses up the ladder to the pinnacle of power, the more important Machiavelli’s principles become to him. It becomes apparent as the play progresses that the loving, trusting, open-hearted ingenuous soul which Edgar was at the beginning of the play has become a resolute, authoritative, and detached monarch at the play’s end. Edmund becomes completely transparent in the play’s final act, but Edgar, in assuming his role of sovereign, becomes completely opaque.

In response to previous criticism regarding the unexciting aspect of Edgar’s character, I believe that I have provided considerable evidence of the interesting, engaging, and complex parts of this personage. I have shown, in essence, that I agree with the statement that he is the second most important figure in the play. If Edgar commands a fraction of the sympathy which Lear evokes, it is because he does not lack
the maturity and leadership ability which precipitate Lear’s woes. As far as Edgar’s mysteriousness is concerned, I would like to point out the fact that Edgar was an open book in the first act; he is only able to survive by covering himself in disguise and by hiding his true feelings while he plays a part which will protect him while he pursues his mission. By extension then, if Edgar proves to be mysterious to us at the play’s end, it is because his assumption of the highest position of responsibility and authority in the nation demands it, not only for his personal protection, but for the execution of the force of his will.

In sum, I posit that Edgar is successful because he actually labors not only for himself, but for the common good. In contrast to Edmund, who never actually sincerely engages with any other character until the very end of the play, and who never feels that he is really a part of society, Edgar shows a firm sense of belonging both in domestic and national circles; he allows his love for the people, the place and the entire nation to support him, and to drive him to the full expression of his potential in the role of prime ruler of England.
Chapter Five: Directing Beyond the Title Role: the Conduct of Edmund and Edgar in Production

Introduction:

All the information in the previous chapters regarding the rules of conduct for the courtier and the prince is extremely useful when planning a production of King Lear. The application of this knowledge can make the difference between performances that have not been well-conceived and well-executed, and those that truly resonate with both the cast and the audience. In fact, I argue that since the cast is made up of sixteen courtiers that the application of the codes of conduct for the courtier is essential the successful creation of a production of King Lear.

The goals set by each of the authors of the conduct books will form a key point in this chapter. In chapter two, I stated that Castiglione’s courtier’s goal was to serve his prince, Machiavelli’s prince’s goal was to preserve his country, and Erasmus’s prince’s goal was to care for the entire population of his country. In this chapter, I will distill each of those goals even further. In this final chapter, I will talk about love as the prime feature that each of the conduct books holds at its essence. Castiglione’s love for the prince motivates him to become nearly god-like in his own quest for perfection. Machiavelli’s love for his country is such that he will make constant efforts to expand it, and to preserve it. Erasmus’s prince loves his country and his people so much that he works without ceasing to improve the quality of life of every subject. In this final chapter, I will discuss ways that the characters of Edgar and Edmund use the conduct books to express love in their own particular ways throughout the course of the play. I will then explain how a director’s use of social and intellectual textualization, character biography, very close reading, and acting techniques (e.g., blocking, use of subtext, stage business,
and the use of unscripted scenes) can be applied to bring the love in the play to the forefront. Then, using the last part of the final scene of the play as an example, I will show how this close reading and appropriate blocking can enhance the audience’s understanding of the play’s resolution. If these tools are employed, I posit that spectators will not be surprised that Edmund expresses a change of heart, nor will they be astonished that Edgar assumes the throne. Instead, they will accept Edmund’s desire for restitution, and they will understand that, of all the courtiers in the play, Edgar is really the best choice for the role of monarch. I will conclude this chapter with a summary of the characters of the two brothers, a short defense of my interpretation of the play and my stage techniques, and a brief statement regarding the use of the conduct books in *King Lear* for stage productions.

*Love in the Conduct Books, and in the Characters of Edgar and Edmund*

Love is the heart of the message in all the conduct books. Machiavelli’s prince’s love for his country is such that he will resort to any measures to maintain his homeland and to keep it safe from foreign invaders. In Erasmus’s work, the love that the prince must feel for his country overrides every other concern; his prince is continually aware that selfless service must be foremost in his mind. Castiglione’s courtier’s only goal is the expression of his dedication to his prince; this courtier must be better than his prince in every way, so that he can guide the prince to a higher standard of morals, loftier thoughts, and better actions.

Machiavelli and Erasmus downplay the importance of personal love relationships; they focus more on love in terms of the nation; the performance of tasks and care for the
citizens in the case of Erasmus, and military defense and political strategy in the case of Machiavelli. Castiglione, however, assumes that the courtier will cultivate many happy and loving relationships with both men and women.

As far as the brothers’ love in the play is concerned, we see that Edgar loves his father and brother, and that he loves Lear, but more than anything else, Edgar’s humanist education leads him to love his country and its people. It is really Edgar’s love for the nation and willingness to serve it which carries the play. This love for the state is the main idea on which the conduct books of Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Erasmus are constructed. However, the subject of Edmund’s love is more complicated. I posit that Edmund loves Edgar, and that his love is returned in kind. But because of his position in society as a younger and illegitimate son, Edmund suffers from parental and societal neglect. He has not been brought up with the idea that it is his destiny to love the state and there is no confirmed place for him to contribute to its well-being. Though he has much to offer, and love to give on this larger scale, his love is unrequited. As a result of his frustration, Edmund turns to self-promotion, using the techniques of Castiglione and Machiavelli, but his love for Edgar and his country do not dissipate; I argue that he wrestles continuously with his competing desires to advance professionally and to serve his loved ones and the nation in the Erasmian way. This conflict can only be resolved when he relinquishes all hope of social advancement, and allows himself to yield to his desire to contribute to the good of the state by attempting to save the lives of Lear and Cordelia.
Biographies of Edmund and Edgar.

The Two Brothers Together

Though Lawrence Stone says that there was a gulf between the eldest brother and younger brothers in the English Renaissance family (115), I argue that these brothers, though they did not relate to each other without conflict, loved each other and were close. I argue that Edgar and Edmund provided each other with love and companionship from their infancy. Children of the nobility in Renaissance England were given to a wet nurse for the first two years of their lives. At about the age of two, children were usually moved back to their parents' home where they were cared for by nurses, tutors, and governesses. Between the ages of 7-14 they were sent away again either to the home of another noble where they would be tutored, or to a boarding school (Stone 115). Men would continue on to university, and then perhaps to be trained at the Inns of Court. Then they would make a tour of the continent for several years before returning home to England where they would seek places at court, or take over responsibilities of the family estate, in the case of oldest sons (Stone 115).

I posit that Edmund and Edgar were cared for as infants in the same home, and that they were educated at Gloucester’s castle by the same tutors, that they knew each other well, and that they had an extremely close relationship. This would serve to explain why Edgar trusts Edmund so completely and is therefore so easily tricked by him. I also think that Gloucester and Edgar spent time considerable together. Gloucester was invested in Edgar because he was the heir, and Edgar accepted this attention and respected his father. Stone states that the relationship with the oldest son was important to the titled landholder (Stone 112). Gloucester also spent time with Edmund, but he was
less interested in him, because it was Edgar who was legitimate, and who would inherit the title and the land. As the mortality rate for children was quite high, Gloucester was most likely very happy that there was a second son who would replace the first-born in the event of that one’s early demise. Stone says that children of the same sex were also given the same name, in the assumption that one of them would probably die before maturity (68). Shakespeare may have alluded to this practice by providing these two characters with very similar names.

*Edmund*

I would cast a tall, handsome, charismatic man as Edmund—someone who is aware of his own beauty and who knows that he is attractive to both males and females. I would probably cast the young Matthew Macfadyen because he is physically appropriate and is coordinated, charming, and has self-discipline as an actor. I am assuming that Edmund is beautiful because his mother was beautiful. She was a tall, dark, shapely unmarried lady who was brought in from one of the smaller courts from one of the outer regions; she believed that her association with Gloucester could help her achieve a better position at the English court.

Kent refers to Edmund as “proper” (1.1.15) and this implies that he appears to be handsome, neat in appearance, and pleasing to the eye. As was stated in chapter three, Coleridge declares that in him we see “the united strength and beauty of earliest manhood” (n. pag.), and I do not disagree with this description. Edmund excels at dancing and the martial arts. He is articulate, and learns quickly. He enjoys the outdoors, but spends a lot of time indoors socializing. He is very competitive and is intellectually
somewhat superior to Edgar. He is very sensitive and is very skilled at reading people and assessing their strengths and weaknesses.

Edgar knows that he will inherit land, wealth, and title, and that he is a valued member of the family, but Edmund knows that he must find a way to live by his wits, his charm, and his appearance. He takes up with other second sons and the lesser gentry at university--some of whom are rascals who are often up to no good. Theirs is a drinking and gambling crowd, but Edmund does not drink enough to lose control very often.

In a number of productions I have seen, Edmund bursts onto the scene with a sly grin on his face and figuratively twirling his moustache. Throughout the play, he exults in the fact that he performs evil and hurtful deeds. Since I am basing my understanding on the conduct books, which are constructed on the idea of love of the nation, I see Edmund very differently. I posit that, since Edmund employs the techniques described in these humanist works, there must be a tension in him and a deep desire to be good and to contribute to society. We see this desire expressed in the final scene of the play after he is mortally wounded.

We have to feel sorry for Edmund in the opening scene and then we have to at least understand him and pity his loneliness as he makes his way to the top of the heap. We have to admire his skill in his persuasion of Gloucester and Edgar, at least a little bit. This character must be likeable and appealing so that both the players and the audience understand why Cornwall, Regan, and Goneril all want a piece of him. We have to understand that he might find all these people quite repugnant, but that he feels that he can’t stop the course of action he has begun.
Edmund can only make a living through the favors which these powerful people bestow upon him. Therefore, his sexual alliances with both Goneril and Regan are completely understandable—he has to spread his net as wide as possible in order to advance politically. As the two of them are in competition, one will most likely die and that person will probably be Regan. Then, too, if he does not attach himself to Goneril, Albany will still remain living, and that will be problematic for him. He reasons that if they (Edmund and Goneril) make an agreement that she will see that Albany is killed. So there is virtually no affect here—it is all a part of his jockeying for position. Edmund’s drinking throughout these scenes will help him withstand his inner turmoil, and it will also indicate to the audience that he needs anesthetizing. The first part of the fifth act will provide us with the opportunity to see how Edmund really feels: he is openly hostile to Albany, which has not been typical of his behavior in the first four acts. As this last act progresses, we realize that he has completely given up on his previous plan to achieve the height of power in the kingdom. After he duels Edgar in the throes of inebriation and expresses a desire for restitution, we need to feel sorry for him again, because we have to realize that he was a man who was born into an impossible situation.

_Edgar_

Edgar, in contrast to his brother, was born into a situation with every possible advantage. The marriage between Gloucester and Edgar’s mother was arranged on the basis of family status and wealth, so he is noble and prosperous on both sides. Edgar does not have to be physically beautiful, because he possesses every other advantage known to man. I picture Edgar as a young Tom Hollander: very short, very English-looking, fair, a
little stocky, short limbs. He is kind, thoughtful, and studious. He is quite a docile student, and while not as sharp and quick as Edmund, he tries harder. He memorizes everything. His tutors love him because he pays attention and shows respect. Knowing that he is the first son, they train him to be dutiful and instill in him the love of the nation. Both brothers benefit from learning from very progressive humanist tutors and then continue their study of humanism at university. Edgar spends a lot of time outdoors, exploring the countryside, and observing the way common people live. He sees his position as the future Earl of Gloucester as a vocation and really a religious calling.

Edgar and Edmund live together and have much of their instruction together, but Edgar spends much of his free time with his tutors or by himself taking walks, observing nature, and watching people. He rides, but does not hunt. He walks, listens, observes. This is a somewhat arbitrary decision, but I am placing them around the south of London for their education—here, Edgar can learn about the ways to Dover from London, and can learn common people's dialects and their ways of living.

He and Edmund both attend university at Oxford, and then spend several years at the Inns of Court. Edmund does a tour of the continent, which accounts for his polished manners and his elegance. Edmund lives at the English court during these years. He reads religious tracts, and history, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and spends a lot of time with clerics.

Edgar is not very beautiful, or graceful, and is not terribly comfortable socially. His clothes are adequate, but not especially fine, and he does not take particular care with his appearance. He is quiet and thoughtful and chooses his words carefully. He spent a lot of time with tutors, so he has a tendency to moralize. He has been warned by his tutors about the foolishness and unreliability of women and he avoids them. They do not feel
attracted to him and he does not really like them. He is not very accomplished in the martial arts, but he does enjoy little games and puzzles. He and Edmund both received instruction in the martial arts as children, and in their free time, they made up these routines which were a combination of standard moves with some funny additions such as singing, whistling, shouting, and some unorthodox footwork. This is one way that they played together.

As they grow older, they grow apart and have different friends, but still see each other. However, during the years Edmund goes abroad, they grow in very different directions. Edgar stays at court, spends a lot of time with his father and with Kent; he really becomes quite close to Lear as well. He learns the ways of Lear's court and gets to know all the court members very well. (This is how he knows about Oswald and his relationship to Goneril.)

When Edgar and Edmund were younger, Edgar could really play the part of the older and wiser brother. But when Edmund returns from the continent, he is so changed, and so elegant, and so sophisticated and splendid that Edgar hardly knows how to speak to him. In the years that Edmund has been away, Edgar, who has never dressed well, has become even less careful about his appearance; his clothes are not fashionable, they do not hang well, he has become a little fat, and his hose sag. He is often out traipsing around the countryside so he is generally somewhat muddy, disheveled, and sweaty.

Edmund, on the other hand, always looks impeccable; his clothes are carefully chosen, he holds himself well, moves with a manly grace, and smells wonderful. He is always ready for fun and witty repartee, which Edgar is not very good at. He finds opportunities to mock the serious Edgar; some of his efforts in this direction make Edgar
laugh, but most of them hurt his feelings and make him feel a little resentful toward Edmund. He loves Edmund so much, but he has considerable difficulty relating to him. When they do spend time together, they often duel with makeshift swords or real ones: Edgar doesn't like this much, but it is a way for him to communicate with Edmund, and it recalls the old days when their relationship was closer and more comfortable.

During their scenes together in the first act, they are talking and are engaging in some kind of period-appropriate physical game or duel. This accomplishes two purposes: it establishes the level of energy of each character, and it also shows that there is a definite level of tension between them. I will use a stage combat coach and have that person orchestrate some characteristic moves for each of them. Edmund should be quite adept at this physical combat and should have great form and skill. Edgar should look like an amateur and maybe even do awkward things like hold the sword with two hands and hold the sword continually at an incorrect angle. Edmund could also do some showing off with fancy tricks. This is really up to the actors. I will suggest this, and then use whatever they choose, with communal tweaking if necessary.

It would also be well if they established some incidents between them when they were young where they helped each other, or had some shared experience which was meaningful. They might have secrets, which only they know about. They won't share this information with anyone. The audience won't know it, but it will help to establish a connection between them which will absolutely be felt. They can spend some time together working out some shared activities, and then when they're on stage, they can improvise every night very slightly; in this way, they'll continue to pay attention to each other, watch each other carefully, and listen at every moment.
There will be a pantomime on the stage before the actors start using the text in the first scene of the first act. Each of the characters will cross the stage engaged in some activity with other characters, e.g., Goneril will cross, deep in conversation with Oswald, while Albany walks quickly behind them, trying to catch up, and vainly attempting to hear what is going on. Kent and Gloucester will also have their moment, which will illustrate their cooperation and friendship. The second-to-last group will be Lear, holding his map, Cordelia, and the Fool. In this group, Lear is talking loudly and walking quite quickly, and they are both at pains to keep up. Edmund and Edgar's unspoken part will be last, and will lead in to the opening dialogue between Kent and Gloucester.

As far as Edmund and Edgar and their part in this pantomime are concerned, I would like to borrow an idea from one of the conduct books. Castiglione talks about the courtiers' engaging in horseplay, throwing things at each other, playing practical jokes, and pushing each other down the stairs. I would like to have the two brothers chasing each other, perhaps dueling on the stairs playing Three Stooges kinds of pranks on each other, and then perhaps sliding down the bannisters and finishing with a little comic ritual they have worked out with the combat director. They could both be singing or humming during this part of the action. Their ritual involves traditional martial arts moves, mixed with non-standard additions. An example of this would be a certain number of the traditional crouched forward steps, and then a very fast entrechat deux or a buck and wing, a shout, and a sword wave, then a landing, a mincing run in a half-circle, and a fast feint forward to the belt, after which they both fall backward elaborately. (We will see a fragment of this sequence in the final scene...) There is an atmosphere of fun here, but there are also elements of tension and competition in this scene as well. The whole fight
routine is not very easy for Edgar; he can’t really manage the tricks very well, and he looks awkward when he performs, though he does smile a little as he tries. Edmund, on the other hand, makes everything look easy, and enjoys himself immensely in this process. He could do something unexpected after the routine is finished, like giving Edgar a surprise whack somewhere to establish physical dominance—it should be something different every night, just to keep things fresh and lively.

*King Lear* is a tragedy, and the rest of the play will certainly be very solemn, but we need this bit of silliness in the beginning to confirm the brothers’ closeness. It is obvious that the Lear, Fool, Cordelia group should get some air time in this pre-speaking section. However, it is critical also that the complicated love/tension between Edgar and Edmund be established at the beginning of the play. Stone states that the relationships between older and younger brothers was always strained (for obvious reasons) and that boys tended to be closer to their sisters, but I argue here that these two, having been brought up together, did have a very intense connection. Edgar’s protective nature, and his tenderness toward Edmund, and pity for his disadvantaged situation would have started it when they were young, and then as Edmund grew, their dynamic would have become much more complex. According to Stone, children in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in England generally did not have strong attachments to any adults, so perhaps these brothers had to rely on each other for love, solace, joy, and companionship (117).

If there is no love between Edmund and Edgar, then the whole subplot has far less meaning and far less impact. Stone discusses his assumption concerning the lack of love in Renaissance society in general (95), but we see throughout the play that giving
and receiving love is really the only thing that is important to Lear. Kent, too, lives only for love of Lear. Gloucester says that he loves his sons, and surely, especially after he becomes blind, his blessings and thoughts of Edgar are nothing if not heartfelt. By the same token, I argue that the reunification and exchange of charity (love) between the brothers after the duel is a critical factor in the play’s impact, and therefore must be established even before their first dialogue.

This whole unspoken part of the play doesn’t have to take long—in fact, it should be short; perhaps a little overture (from a small stage orchestra) would support it and would give it a definite beginning, middle, and end. The point of this section is to underscore the fact that there is a long history of love, irritation, appreciation, resentment, tenderness, competition, and mutual support here, and prepare the audience for the first scene between the two brothers. The first scene between them could easily establish a relationship of pure antagonism between Edmund and Edgar, but my conception of their relationship is quite different. In fact, one of my most important assumptions about the brothers is that Edgar plans to share the family fortune and the land with Edmund after Gloucester dies; I am assuming that he told Edmund this many times when they were small, but when they became older he didn’t think it appropriate or respectful to Gloucester. Edmund now doubts Edgar’s willingness to share; in his despair, and doubting of Edgar’s love, he uses this sharing theme in his speech to Gloucester to support Edgar’s alleged murder plot against him (1.2.52-53). This move is really bad faith on his part, but such is the level of Edmund’s paranoia, discouragement, and low self-esteem. I posit further that Edmund has been shown a lot of respect at university, at the Inns at Court, and in his travels abroad. It follows then that when he experiences
Gloucester’s humiliation in the presence of Kent, that this is a shock which causes a kind of emotional fugue. As I stated in chapter two, Whigham asserts that when noble sons came down from university they were often confronted with the fact that court life did not mesh with their humanist education (21). I posit further that Edmund’s experience had led him to believe that he had a very good chance to find a lucrative position at court, and that he would be the recipient of many favors. I argue that this shock causes the brilliant and capable Edmund, who is more emotionally fragile than Edgar, to make a radical decision to take Edgar’s land.

Once Edmund gets started on his trajectory, he can’t stop, but his contrasting feelings continue to collide inside him. The director and the actor can do quite a bit to show the doubt and conflict Edmund experiences along this path, especially in the soliloquies and in the asides. There can be pauses, sighs, hesitations, and clear stresses and intonations which indicate ambivalence in the speeches. I would have Edmund start drinking even in Act I. In the first scene, after the soliloquy, he projects the pleasure-seeking image of Bacchus; his drinking will punctuate the speech really nicely. However, through the progression of his scenes, especially after his expressed doubt about the wisdom of turning his father in as a traitor in the third act, his drinking looks more compulsive; he becomes a lot looser, and less controlled. By the beginning of the fifth act, after the battle with the French forces, it is clear that he has been pounding down the wineskins. By the time Edgar challenges him, he is three sheets to the wind.
Analysis of the Last Section of the Final Scene of the Play

There has to be a showdown between these two brothers in the final scene, and it is evident that it is not going to be very elegant. By the opening of act five, Edmund is intoxicated to the point that he should not be allowed within fifty feet of any weapon, and we know that Edgar is hardly a master of the martial arts. They must duel, and they will duel, but the spectacle can only provide pathos and not awe or admiration. The fate of the nation hangs in the balance, yet the two opponents will not be able to create a respectable combat. Edgar has vowed to Albany that he can “produce a champion” (5.1.3075) but when the Edgar appears, summoned by the trumpet, his appearance is hardly promising. He sports a makeshift mask, Oswald’s elaborate coat, which is much too large for him, the Old Man’s trousers, a sword which is so heavy he can hardly hold it, and Oswald’s too-large boots.

Before he challenges Edmund, while they are still standing several yards from each other, Edgar carefully removes his coat and boots, revealing his peasant’s outfit (complete with pants held up with twine). He is still wearing his mask, and his feet are bare. This prompts Edmund, who can hardly speak for laughing, to announce to his opponent that his outside “looks so fair and warlike…” (5.3.132). When the challenges are finished, Edmund wastes no time approaching him with great lunges. They spar awkwardly for less than thirty seconds, when the winded Edgar suddenly runs behind a tree. Edmund, very drunk, turns his back to the tree, and strides toward Albany and the other spectators, holding up his arms as if he were the victor. He is several yards away from the tree when Edgar re-emerges with a loud shout. Edmund turns around, relaxed, but still holding his sword. Edgar races at him, quite stung at being ridiculed, yelling a
little snatch of their old song; he executes a tiny bit of the footwork, and then instead of executing the feint, he, holding the sword in both hands, attempts to cut Edmund’s right upper arm (a standard combat move), so that Edmund will drop his sword. Because Edgar has so little control, he misses his arm and hits Edmund’s neck. (This hit can actually be high up on the shoulder—there can be lots of padding here.) This can all happen very quickly, and even if the hit is not accurate, Edmund’s reaction can cover by his grabbing his neck and falling. An alternative move would be Edgar’s thrusting to the belt. The reaction to this move is easier for Edmund to feign, but the actor playing Edgar would have to decide if he is able to directly go in for a kill at this moment. After Edmund falls, Edgar stares at him for a moment in horror, and Albany shouts “Save him, save him!” (5.3.142). There is a lot of ambiguity here. It is all too much, too fast. Goneril runs to Edmund and scolds him, and she and Albany scuffle, while Edmund bleeds to death. This is a very messy scene.

Edmund thinks he knows his opponent, but asks who he is anyway. He is still too squiffy to be able to reason properly, on top of the fact that he’s in shock because he’s bleeding to death. Edgar reveals his identity, and then it might be well for him to hold Edmund and weep a little bit. Gloucester is dead and he has just inflicted a mortal wound on his brother which means that he has no family left. In order to retain his composure somewhat, Edgar resorts to moralizing: “…The dark and vicious place where thee he got/ Cost him his eyes” (5.3.162-163).

Edgar. Let's exchange charity.
I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more th’hast wrong’d me.
My name is Edgar and thy father's son.
The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

Edmund. Th' hast spoken right; 'tis true.
The wheel is come full circle; I am here. (5.3.157-164)

This is not a soap opera, so they cannot rhapsodize at length about their childhood and how much they love each other. I take the language they use in this scene to be code for the expression of all the emotions they are feeling and all the things that they need to share that cannot be said. I would stage this with physical closeness to be determined by the nature of Edmund’s injuries. Perhaps Edgar could try to stop the bleeding under these lines, make Edmund comfortable, perhaps remove some of his clothing, and help others to put Edmund on a pallet.

Albany needs to get in on the picture at this point—we have to have him embrace Edgar in order to position him to ask the next question which leads into Edgar’s speech. This embrace also places Edgar squarely within the structure of the established social and political order, and it also moves him away from Edmund because the story now has to shift away from the personal and more toward the welfare of the nation.

In answer to Albany’s question, Edgar begins to relate his saga, creating history which will promote national pride, and which will also create an aura of superiority about his person. (This retelling of the play’s events also helped the distracted audience members in the boxes and on the noisy ground levels to catch up.) This kind of storytelling reinforces Edgar’s connection to centuries of royalty and confirms that primogeniture is part of the correct social system. Underneath all of this action is a comparison between the two brothers. Edgar describes his courageous and noble deeds
since his fall from grace, but if we compare these actions to those of Edmund, Edgar looks even more like a hero.

After Edgar recites the first part of his speech, Edmund interjects these lines: “This speech of yours hath mov'd me,/ And shall perchance do good; but speak you on; /You look as you had something more to say” (5.3.190-193). This interruption not only serves to break up a very long narrative, but it also calls our attention back to Edmund. When he says that he is moved by his brother’s speech, and that it “shall perchance do good” (5.3.191) he is warning the audience that he is about to make an announcement which might come as a surprise.

At this point, Albany speaks up: “If there be more, more woeful, hold it in;/ For I am almost ready to dissolve,/ Hearing of this” (5.3.193-194). This speech serves as another signal to the audience that Albany is not going to be able to remain in his position because he is on the verge of emotional collapse. Edgar continues with his speech, and relates the story of Kent’s nervous breakdown:

“...with his strong arms
He fastened on my neck, and bellowed out
As he'd burst heaven; threw him on my father;
Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him
That ever ear receiv'd; which in recounting
His grief grew puissant, and the strings of life
Began to crack.... (5.3.205-214Q)

Edgar is really obliged to continue with his story, because through the information given in this speech, we become aware that Kent is not going to be able to shoulder any responsibilities in the future, either.

A gentleman comes to announce the deaths of Goneril and Regan, and Edmund makes a joke about all three of them marrying in an instant. His remark is actually clever,
humorous, and absurdly erotic, but it is also extremely undignified. It bespeaks the colossal social disorder which Edmund has precipitated and provides yet another sign that Edmund could never have been king.

Kent enters and asks where the King is, which gives Albany another chance to prove his unfitness to rule. He readily admits his inadequacy himself: “Great thing of us forgot!!” (5.3.210). He asks Edmund where Lear and Cordelia are, but Edmund is too busy making remarks about the bodies of Goneril, Regan and himself to reply immediately. Albany allows himself to be distracted once again, as he asks for the faces of Regan and Goneril to be covered. It is only at this point that Edmund tells Albany to send quickly to the castle to withdraw his writ on the lives of Lear and Cordelia. Albany responds to this information by passing the responsibility to Edgar, who points out that he needs more specific instructions before he can take effective action:

Duke of Albany. Run, run, O, run!  
Edgar. To who, my lord? Who has the office? Send Thy token of reprieve.  
Edmund. Well thought on. Take my sword; Give it the Captain. (5.3.221-224)

Once again, both Edmund and the flustered Albany prove their lack of practicality; it is up to Edgar yet again to manage the situation.

As soon as Edmund delivers this information, Albany orders him to be borne offstage. His role in the play has ended. Lear enters immediately after this scene, and there cannot be two important characters dying onstage at the same time. When the Captain enters the stage minutes later to announce Edmund’s demise, Albany says “That's but a trifle here” (5.3.270), which indicates that Edmund’s role in the larger scheme of things is now completely insignificant. There are much greater concerns on the
horizon at this point; Albany bestows Lear’s previous role of king upon him, he restores Kent’s title and place at court, and he also gives Edgar his title and land as Earl of Gloucester as well.

As the scene progresses, Edgar continues to play the role of leader. When Lear utters his last lines and dies, Edgar thinks that he faints and tries to revive him: “Look up, my lord” (5.3.287). The more experienced and mature Kent informs Edgar that Lear has passed away and that he must not try to bring him back. Here, we see that though Edgar is well-meaning, he is young, and that he still has much to learn. What is heartening about this incident is that Edgar actually listens to Kent and that he actually agrees that Lear has, indeed, expired.

Albany then commands Kent and Edgar to rule together. The weary and grief-stricken Kent understandably declines this honor, and exits the stage. At this point, it should be absolutely no surprise that the self-controlled, loyal, pedantic, and doggedly persevering Edgar assumes the kingship and remains alone on stage to deliver the final speech.

Conclusion:

As my thesis has shown, when viewed through the lens of conduct literature, Edmund and Edgar do not appear to be opposing figures at all. Instead, they are two members of court who employ the methods prescribed by Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Erasmus in different ways, and with different goals in mind. In the biographical section of this chapter, I have shown that Edmund and Edgar possess similar intellectual abilities, and capacities to lead. It is only the accident of birth which provides Edgar with the edge to make his way to the kingship; he has been trained and educated to assume an important
role of responsibility. It is clear that Edgar manages to find his way back into power by shaping his behavior according to the advice offered in the three conduct books. It is also evident that following this advice takes a significant toll; he must never allow his emotions to influence his behavior, and he must ultimately choose the welfare of the state over his personal loyalties.

Edmund is much less fortunate than Edgar, who has had the support of King Lear and Gloucester his entire life. Edmund, for his part, has had the benefit of the same formal education as his brother, as well as the exposure to court life, but familial and societal barriers have prevented him from ever achieving power through legitimate means. Edmund follows the advice of Machiavelli and Castiglione are remarkably well in the first four acts, and is very successful in acquiring the power he craves. However, by the fifth act, it becomes evident that the emotional strain involved in maintaining the façade of impenetrable power is not sustainable for extended periods of time.

Edmund is, in a way, a character who is easier to like than Edgar, but it should be clear to the audience at the end of the play that his brother will make a better, if not sexier king. Edgar is certainly no rock star. He is steady and dutiful, and he attempts to do what is right. He has no drinking problem, and no woman problem, and no self-esteem issues. He is very, very practical, and very paternal after the fashion of Erasmus’s prince. He appears to be virtually free of the charm Castiglione prizes so much, but we have to appreciate him, and we absolutely must love him, trust him, and admire him before the last speech. His behavior before, during, and after the duel should really help the audience to like him and maybe even love him, as will the scene with Albany when Edgar takes charge of the logistics in arresting the murders of Lear and Cordelia.
The creation of biographies and the building of a back story might be too cumbersome and perhaps even absurdly far-fetched for those who have not been baptized in the church of method acting. I argue, however, that the application of these detailed practices is the only way to create unity within the play and between the players. I argue also that these practices depend on a very close reading of the text, which helps the director and the actor to discover the soul in each character. When this discovery has been made, the nuances of the play's intent can be conveyed to the audience through subtle relationships, original blocking, choreography, improvisation, imaginative stage business, creative use of props, scenery, and costumes, expressions, pauses, and body language. The use of biography and back story to shape the production prevent the actor, director, and audience from deciding that Edmund is the bad guy and that Edgar is the good guy. There is abundant evidence in the stories created around them, and in their various appropriations of the teachings of Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Erasmus, throughout the play, that these characters are far more interesting and much more complicated than this too-simple analysis.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I noted that A.C. Bradley asserts that Shakespeare was "exceptionally careless" (25) in the creation of the play's ending. I argue that the close reading of the final scene I have described above reveals all the parts that make Edgar the only plausible candidate for the kingship. In that same chapter, I also stated that Charles Lamb, Harold Bloom, and Jan Kott all doubted that King Lear could be produced successfully. One of the main reasons for this, I believe, is the problem of split focus: there is Lear's plot, and then there is the Gloucester subplot. The reader and audience must also keep track of fourteen supporting courtiers, plus the two
main courtiers, Edmund and Edgar. It is a real challenge for the readers and the audience members to figure out where to direct their attention. If the critics I have surveyed are any indication, most readers choose to focus on Lear. Most directors also choose to give all the attention to the person of Lear, which is both the correct choice and the incorrect choice. It is the correct choice in that Lear’s spectacular wrong-headedness and operatic outbursts make for some great theatre. It is the incorrect choice in that, when Lear’s personal trajectory ends in tears and death, the audience is faced with the last man standing whom they feel they do not really know or care about: grubby little Edgar in bare feet reciting a very staid and rather ambiguous set of rhymed couplets. I argue that, before we get to this moment, the director must make absolutely sure that we all know what a loving, courageous, practical (if inexperienced), hero Edgar is. Before the last lines in the play, we must all already know that he will be ten times the king Lear was, and that everything he has done shows that he will restore the precious stone, set in a silver sea, which has nearly been destroyed by poor management. If the director does this, people will feel the catharsis of pity and fear, and will leave the theatre completely satisfied. If the director does not do this, everyone will want their money back, and they might even think that King Lear is not a good play. This would be the real tragedy.

If my study of the courtiers in King Lear has proven anything, it is that there is immense value in the study of historical and sociological influences that shape a play, and the positive influence this study can have on a thoughtful and carefully executed production. The text provides only the skeleton of the play; it is up to the director, the actors, and the audience to flesh it out, and to breathe life into its body. The advice offered in the conduct books of Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Erasmus provide invaluable
tools in this process. These works will provide enormous assistance to any director of *King Lear* who chose to benefit from the treasure trove of knowledge found inside their covers.
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