

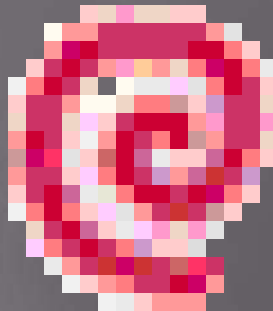
# King Lear

## Act Three



# Act three, scene 1

- **Swift short** scenes.
- Depict Lear's **dramatic descent** into **madness**.
- We learn what happens to Lear's **mirror image**, Gloucester.
- Spiralling **downwards** for both characters.



# Lear and Gloucester.

- Scene culminates in **violence** against **Gloucester**.
- Lear and Gloucester are both **heroic, tragic figures** in Act III. III.i sets the scene for us.
- Gentleman's descriptions of **Lear** on the heath
  - prepare us for the sight of the **lunatic king** in the next scene and
  - establish the violence of the storm.
- Kent provides **information** about another kind of chaos - clash between **English and French** forces.
- Characters' **anxiety about Lear** reflects the concern the audience probably feels at this point in the play.

# Lear's Speech

- These establish and reflect the **properties of the storm.**
- Full of **anger and distress.**
- Moves from **one topic to another.**
- **Violent imagery** – reflects Lear's state of mind.
- Lear's **isolation** is shown by his **lack of interaction** with the other characters on stage.
- Engaged in an **internal struggle.**
- Battling to **preserve his wits.**

# Storm...



- A metaphor for Lear and England's plight.
- Lear's obsession with justice and criminal behaviour.
  - Introduced in this scene.
  - Maintained until the end of the play.
- King started to consider issues he took too little care of as ruler.
- Journey towards greater understanding of himself and the world around him has begun.

# The Fool's prophecy...

SUGGESTING  
OPTIMISTICALLY...

- **Virtue** will **triumph** in England
- **Optimism** about the future is misplaced.



OR

- that **optimism** about the **future** is misplaced
- In these **terrible days** men use their **feet** for **walking**.

- ☐ He provides a **moment of relief**.
- ☐ There is a **pause** in the **action**.
- ☐ The audience **gathers its thoughts**.

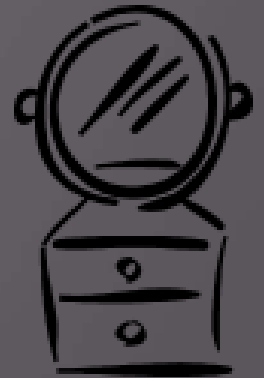
# Act three, scene three

- Edmund has his sights set on his father's (Gloucester's) title.
- Makes the decision to betray his father without hesitation.
- It befits his ruthless nature.
- Gloucester has prevaricated (stalled) - shows that he is anxious about his decision to support Lear.



# Gloucester...

- His feverish fretting mirrors the alarm the audience will feel at the end of the scene.
- In great DANGER now.
- EVIL continues to triumph.
- *Good intentions* will once again be thwarted.
- Gloucester's earnest desire to assist Lear seems as hopeless and doomed as Kent and the Fool's concern in the previous scene.





# Act three, scene four

- A scene of **isolation and suffering**.
- Each character is **oppressed** by his own **concerns**.
- **Kent** **agitated** because **Lear** **suffers**.
- Fool shivers in the storm.
- Both are helpless bystanders.
- Like Lear, **Gloucester** is **preoccupied** with thoughts of **filial ingratitude** (his children do not appreciate him!)

# Edgar's craziness...

- Reflects his own sufferings as an outcast.
- Heightens our sense of the king's suffering.
- Speeches are erratic in a way that Lear's are not.
- Full of terrifying descriptions of physical and mental violence.
- Through his interaction with poor Tom, Lear undergoes a terrible kind of purging.
- Lear also displays the stoicism (long-suffering endurance) of a true tragic hero.
- However, his patience is hard won.

# Is Lear learning compassion?

- Observe his concern for Kent, the Fool and Poor Tom.
- Reflected in his lines about the fate of the homeless: 'O, I have ta'en/Too little care of this' (lines 32-33).
- The audience's pity for Lear increases as he learns to pity others.
- Lear has recognised the need to look beyond appearances when he tries to remove his clothing



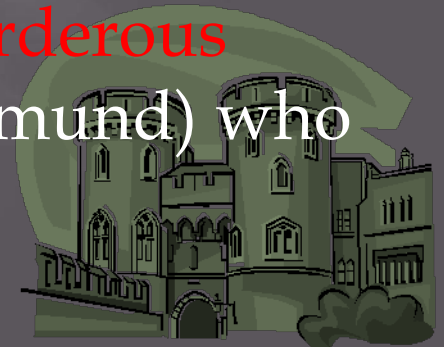


# Edgar...(Tom)

- His description of his life as a **corrupt servant** can be read as a **comment** on **Oswald's career**.
- Could be a **parody** of the **seven deadly sins**.
- His account of **seven years** as a **beggar** seems to be directed at Gloucester – he will **judge him harshly** for his adultery later in V.3.
- Lear and Gloucester are **both forced** to face up to their sins.
- Lear has already started **to confront** his failings.

# Some hope remains...

- In spite of the **madness and suffering...**
- Characters **sympathise** with one another.
- **Kent** initially reluctant to allow **Poor Tom** to take **shelter** with the king.
- Prevailing mood is **sombre**.
- Poor Tom's references to the '**dark tower**' and **the Jack the giant killer** story in the **final lines** of the scene are **ominous**.
- Gloucester's **castle** now houses four **murderous predators** (Gonerill, Regan, Cornwall, Edmund) who **plot** against their fathers.

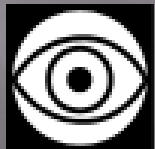


# Act three, scene five

- First lines suggest that violence is imminent.
- Confirmed by Cornwall's consistently decisive and ruthless tone.
- Shows his ease with language.
- Speaks politely and formally to Cornwall.
- Cornwall acts as if he is the father of the nation.
- Edmund's aside to the audience is vicious and cold blooded as Cornwall's.
- Both evil men lust selfishly and destructively for power.

# Act three, scene six

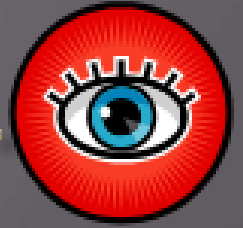
- Cold blooded discussion in III.5 **contrasts** sharply with the solicitous (considerate and concerned) way **Gloucester and Kent** continue to behave towards to Lear.
- **Mock trial** is a **parody** of the 'love-test' in 1.1.
- However, here **Lear's judgment** is not faulty.
- His **madness** has helped him to see his **daughters** clearly.







# Act three, scene seven..



- Shocking act of **physical violence**.
- **Physical torture** matches the **mental agony** Lear endures in Act III.
- Many references to **eyes** and **sight**.
- Increases the **tension**.
- Prepares us for **Gloucester's blinding**.
- Begins with **Gonerill's 'Pluck out his eyes'**. (line 5)





# Act three, scene seven

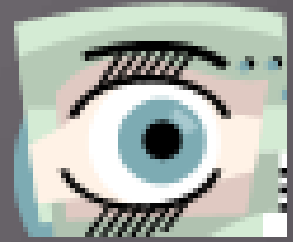
- Gonerill does not take part in Gloucester's maiming.
- But her suggestion implicates her.
- Gloucester achieves heroism through suffering (like Lear).
- Like Kent, he suffers because he has tried to help Lear.



# Gloucester...

- Powerful speeches – Gloucester eloquent, brave and determined.
- Defends himself.
- Castigates Cornwall and Regan for their cruelty to the king.
- Becomes the voice of the audience.
- Describes their outrage.
- Learns the truth about his children in a brutal way (like Lear).
- Shares Lear's agony when he discovers that he has been taken in by outward experiences.

# Barbaric scene...



- **Barbarism** of the whole scene is summed up by **Regan's final callous order** to the servants.
- **Cruelty** of the scene indicates that the world has been turned **upside down**.
- A woman suggests a method of torture.
- Another woman relishes inflicting pain, eggs her husband on to further cruelty
- Before killing a man herself.



# Another miscarriage of justice

- A servant turns on his master.
- Act of heroism prepares us for the kindness the servants show Gloucester at the end of the scene.
- The play has reached its lowest point before the tragic final scene.
- However, the generous actions of the servants in III,7 indicate that there is some kind of justice at work.



# Bye Bye

Adapted from York Notes Advanced

