

KING LEAR, ACT FOUR



Act four, scene 1

- At the start of the scene, Edgar seems to **feel positive**.
- His **experiences** have taught him to withstand the **'blasts'** (line 9) of **Fortune**.
- Like Gloucester and Lear, he has learnt to **endure**.
- **Gloucester's stoicism** is severely tested in IV sc i.
- He has been **pushed to the limits of endurance** – as his view of the sadistic gods shows us.

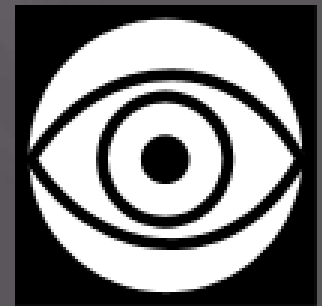
Is Gloucester's verdict an accurate description of the world of King Lear?

- Or is his **pessimism** a reflection of his **current state of mind**?
- At his most **desolate**, Gloucester acts **generously** towards others.
- Speaks **graciously** to the **old man** and **Poor Tom**.
- Seems more concerned with their **fortunes** than his own.
- This scene proves again that **man can be kind**.



Gloucester's interest in social justice...

- Reflects that of **Lear** and proves that the **patriarchs** have learned **to see** the world clearly.
- As Gloucester says so aptly; he **'stumbled'** when he **saw** (line 19).
- For Gloucester, **clarity of vision** brings **despair**.
- **Edgar's role** in this scene is **to guide** our responses to his **father's misery**.



Act Four, scene two

- **Change in Albany** – suggests that the influence of the **evil characters** will no longer go **unchecked**.
- **Albany** becomes a **figure of justice** and **morality** in this scene.
- Voices the audience's **concerns** about his wife.
- **Gonerill** continues to **assume authority** – **disregards** her husband and **woos Edmund**.
- Her **desires and actions** are **subversive** and **immoral**.
- **CLASH** between *good* (**Albany**) and **EVIL** (**Gonerill**), points towards the battle between the **French** and **British forces** at the end of Act IV.

Act Four, scene three

- Prepares us for **Cordelia's return**.
- She is now the epitome of **graceful, Christian femininity**.
- Described as **passionate and loving**.
- The **reconciliation** between Lear and Cordelia will be **painful and poignant**.





Lear...

- Has started to **regain his wits**.
- **Clarity of vision** brings with it **distress and regret**.
- Father and daughter share the **same emotion:**
sorrow.



Act four, scene four


- Lear's **crown of weeds** has symbolic significance.
- The **king** is associated with **nature** rather than the world of the **court**.

- This is **fitting** given his interest in **justice** and the **human condition**.

- Cordelia shows **great compassion** for her **father** – her sole concern.
- **Actively assists** the parent who **rejected** her so cruelly (like Edgar).

Act four, scene five

- Regan's **preoccupation** with her own **selfish lust** contrasts sharply with **Cordelia's generosity** in the previous scene.
- Act four – **Lear's daughters are juxtaposed**, scene by scene.
- We watch the **progress** of both **good and evil**



Regan's language...

- Used to describe her **liaison** with **Edmund** is entirely in keeping with the **materialistic desires** of the **evil** characters.
- Edmund is **'more convenient'** (line 31) for her than Gonerill.
- Gonerill and Regan are **divided by their rivalry in love.** 
- **Good characters** share the **same aims** and appear to be **gathering strength.**
- People are **appalled** by **Gloucester's blinding** – suggests **evil** might be **vanquished.**



Act Four, scene six

- Edgar's description of the **view from the cliff top** serves two purposes:
 - **to convince** his father that he stands on the edge of the cliff,
 - To show **Gloucester's desperation**.
- His **aside (line 42)** hints at the **terror** created by Gloucester's attempted suicide.
- Seems both **tragic and absurd**.
- Guides **our responses** to Gloucester.
- Edgar **says very little** when **Lear** is on stage – offers brief asides.



Words...

- Edgar's words **emphasise** the **pathos** of the **exchange** between Lear and Gloucester
- Both patriarchs seem worn out, but they '**see how this world/goes**' (line 148-9)
- Have achieved **understanding and wisdom** through **suffering**.
- Lear's lines about **adultery** might be read as an attempt to **come to terms** with his own **sexual union** with his **daughters' mother** – did he cause those **hard hearts**?

Lear...

- Lear appears to play the **same role** for **Gloucester** that the **Fool** played for him.
- He is a **cruel commentator** in this scene.
- His **obsession with justice** fits in with his earlier concern for **'unaccommodated man'** (III.4.103)



Act Four, scene seven

- Scene of **pathos and renewal**.
- **Sleep and music** were understood to have **powerful healing** properties.
- Sense of restoration heightened when the characters kneel before Lear, who is treated as a powerful monarch.
- All the words addressed to him are respectful and he 'sits above' his subjects once more.

However...

- He is **not** the **towering figure** he once was.
- **Speeches** hesitant.
- **Humbles** himself before **Cordelia**.
- No longer speaks of himself as the royal **'we'**.
- Understands that he **has sinned against Cordelia** and wishes to **honour her**.
- However, he does **not** accept **responsibility** for Gonerill and Regan.

Is Lear a victim?

- Gonerill and Regan are identified as the **sole** cause of the **king's suffering**.
- Lear views himself as a **victim** – do we?
- His lines are full of **self-pity**.
- This scene is a **relief** after the **chaos and darkness** of Acts III and IV.

Bye Bye

Adapted from York Notes Advanced

