

# KING LEAR

## GLOUCESTERS SUICIDE – ACT 4, SCENE 6

### SCENE SUMMARY:

Still in disguise as 'poor tom', Edgar pretends to lead Gloucester up onto a cliff at Dover, where he intends to commit suicide. Edgar gives vivid descriptions of the steep cliff and the sea below to the blinded Gloucester. He says they are there and pretends to leave Gloucester on the 'cliff', where Gloucester prays for forgiveness then 'jumps' and passes out as he falls to the ground. Edgar wakes him up in a new disguise as a gentleman on the beach below, he says that he saw him fall from the cliff top and is amazed he survived the fall, and that the gods must want him to live. Gloucester accepts this explanation that he has been saved by the gods, and agrees to endure & live.

### QUOTES & LANGUAGE ANALYSIS:

- 'methinks the ground is even' – Gloucester – as he doubts Edgars lie about where they are.
- 'horribly steep' Edgar convinces Gloucester he is really climbing a hill.
- 'the murmuring surge' Edgar uses sound imagery in his description of the beach below, he also uses alliteration and many other linguistic techniques to make Gloucester believe he is really on a cliff edge.
- 'thy life's a miracle' - Edgar is emphatic as he insists that the gods must have saved Gloucester from death.

### CONTEXT:

- A popular explanation for events at the time was in astrology, through out the play we hear Gloucester refer to his belief in astrology (something Edmund does not believe in) and his belief that eclipses cause unnatural events, like the breakdown of society. His belief in higher powers could explain why he easily accepts Edgars reasoning that the gods want him to live.
- In Elizabethan England suicide was deemed a sin, because you were taking into your own hands something that should have been up to the gods to decide. This is why Gloucester prays for forgiveness and asks Edgar to keep his suicide a secret. It is also possibly why Edgar is so persistent that he must not succeed in doing it and must not think about attempting it again – instead of letting him escape his suffering through death.