



As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods

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Gloucester:

I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw,
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind
Was then scarce friends with him. I have heard more
since.
As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods,
They kill us for their sport.

[King Lear Act 4, scene 1, 32–37](#)

Perhaps the most desperate lines in a desperate play, the Duke of Gloucester's speech culminates scene after scene of abject cruelty and senseless brutality. For the kindness he has shown the disgraced King Lear on a stormy night [*see* [MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING](#)], Gloucester has been blinded by two of the king's enemies, Lear's daughter Regan and her husband.

Gloucester, like Lear, has had to face up to cruel revelations. The son he thought treacherous—Edgar—has proved innocent, but only after Gloucester drove him out. He is the wormlike "fellow" Gloucester saw before his blinding—Edgar in disguise as a mad beggar. And like Lear, the pompous Gloucester has been forced to feel what the wretched of the earth feel—the cruelties of heaven and of mankind alike [*see* [TAKE PHYSIC, POMP](#)]. The duke sums up his revelation in two of the most memorable lines in Shakespeare, likening the gods to immature, uncaring, unjust children, and man to insignificant flies, creatures subject to sportful cruelty.

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