KING LEAR
Act 3, Scene 2

LEAR: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricans! spout...

Tell you have dressed the heavens, driven the rocks
You thunderers and thought-resisting fire...
Ye noisomeurers of oak-leaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white beard! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

Strike flat the thick immensity of 'tis world!
Crash, nature's works, all grooms amiss ordain'd,
That make unhappy meet.

Faith... Here's a night piteous, neither wise men
nor fools.
The play this evening is acted by nineteen students from the University of Texas at Austin who are registered for a course entitled "English 379M: The Play." These students have studied King Lear, not in the conventional classroom way, but by performing it. Through that process, the play has become a means of understanding, not an end in itself. Therefore, what they do tonight not only brings to a conclusion their semester of work on King Lear but it also expresses their undivided and corporate striving to communicate to one another and to you what this play means. That striving, that struggle, to fathom the mysteries of man trying to discover himself; in spite of himself, has provided a valuable opportunity for each student to examine himself through the various roles he plays.

Edgar's speech at the end of the play bespeaks their intent and I hope their achievement:

"The weight of this sad time we must obey,  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
The oldest hat borne most; we that are young  
Shall never see so much, nor live so long."

Ironically, their performance is an attempt to disprove the last statement.
THE TRAGEDY
OF
KING LEAR

Lear, the aging king of early Britain, divests himself of regal responsibility by dividing his kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The youngest, Cordelia, refuses to indulge in the sycophantic rhetoric her father demands. Rashly Lear banishes her. When his loyal adviser Kent attempts to curb the King, he too is banished.

The child-parent conflict is echoed in the subplot of Gloucester and his two sons, the legitimate Edgar and the bastard Edmund. Gloucester is deceived by Edmund into believing that Edgar is plotting against him. To stay in the kingdom, Edgar, like Kent, assumes a mask. Kent becomes Lear’s serving man, Edgar, the madman Tom o’Bedlam.

Goneril and Regan complete Lear’s degradation by depriving him of all material wealth and sending him into the night storm where he meets the wild Tom. Accused by Regan and her husband Cornwall of traitorous conspiring with Lear, Gloucester is blinded. A servant, shocked by this cruelty, kills Cornwall. Regan, now left a widow pursues Edmund.

Cordelia, wife to the king of France, declares war upon her sisters and Edmund but is defeated and with Lear sent to prison. Desiring Edmund for herself, Goneril plots the death of her husband, Albany, and poisons Regan. Edgar, still unrecognized but no longer Tom, challenges and defeats his brother. Goneril, realizing all is lost, commits suicide. Edmund’s order to have Lear and Cordelia killed are not stopped in time. Cordelia murdered, Lear breaks down and dies of grief, leaving the rule of the kingdom in the hands of Albany and Edgar.