

THE MACBETH PAPERS



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DEDICATION

FOR DJ OVERTON...FOREVER & ALWAYS

IT WAS A VERY LONG WAIT BUT WORTH EVERY SECOND....



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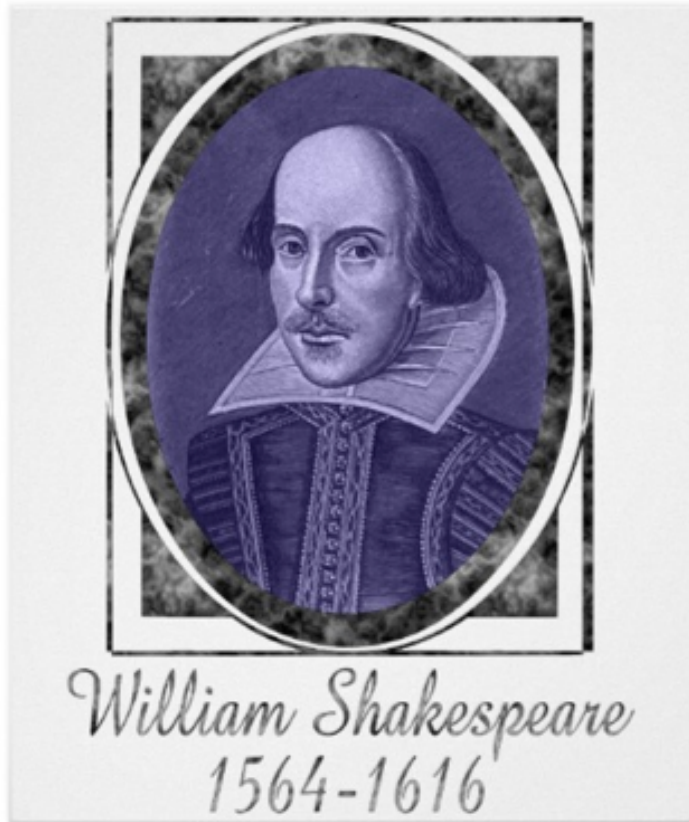
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PREFACE



As an English teacher in an urban high school, my greatest joy, and the most fun to be had by and with students, was with Macbeth. While this play was a tragedy of major proportions, somehow we managed to enjoy it so much that it was a delightful experience. Hopefully, my readers will glean some of that pleasure from this volume very loosely connected to Shakespeare's work.

KBN-O

"I Come, Greymalkin"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 1)

**These two wretched hags,
not unlike myself,
send shivers,
layered like so many shingles,
into chilled flesh of passersby.
They are kin to me.
I rush to them, Greymalkin,
as you to cats
with matted fur and bleeding paws,
screeching incantations
in the dark and swollen air.**

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 1)

Discombobulation!!!

How disconcerting...

How delicious to distort...

Amusingly devastating

Wickedly entertaining

There's delight afoot tonight!

"Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 2)

**Loosely woven dreams precariously
stitched his nights.**

**Gathered in bunches, they unfolded like pleats;
dark thoughts hemmed at both ends.**

**Nightmares dangled by threads...frayed
his nerves.**

**And, guilt, sewn into the fabric of memory,
struggled to escape and awakened him.**

"What bloody man is that?"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 2)

**It is a controlled madness that wins battles....
that closets rage
until it swells,
battering with jagged horror
to free itself.**

**Macbeth,
slipped this madness beneath a suit of mail,
poured it in metal boots,
and tucked it precariously beneath the
visor of his helmet
until it burst.....**

**schrapnel,
felling bodies like summer hail.**

***"If you can look into the seeds of time, and say
which grain will grow and which will not..."***

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc.2)

**He seemed so fragile, this child born too soon...
His limbs, so gangly, his head tilted to one side...
How could he survive,
thrive in a world fraught with danger?
What have we wrought in letting him live
among children twice his size?**

**And, yet, the years passed.
He stood his ground,
held his head up straight...
We saw those limbs fill out, watched him
outrun the others.
Strong, wily, clever...Never did one of them
test his resolve, best him on the field, nor wrest
from him this crown...
He lived to be a man whose life had purpose,
a man of means, a man none demeaned...
He seemed so fragile, one we might have drowned
as others were...yet fate intervened.**

"Yet it shall be tempest-tost"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 3)

**When wills collide,
balls of ice slicing window panes,
the flying shards, like missiles
randomly fired, target innocent fantasies
and guilty plots alike.
And shattered dreams are tossed,
an unlikely salad, bitter and colorless,
to fall on empty plates of glass.**

"Look how our partner's rapt"

(Macbeth: Act 1, Sc. 3)

**He is an asylum where ideas,
thick with doubt,
hang blindly from thought
like bats in hollow caves.
Awakened, his schemes
beat violent wings,
each a lunatic rodent
destroying sanity
in wild rabid flight.**

"...as one studied in his death..."

(Macbeth: Act 1, Sc. 4)

**It was as if he,
a seasoned actor, had,
with some improvisation,
memorized a classic script...
scrupulously studied each line,
staged imaginative dissolves,
lifted a common theme above the trite,
and at the final curtain,
thrilled an awestruck audience
witness to the performance of a lifetime.**

***"Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my
black and deep desires."***

(Macbeth Act I, Sc. 4)

**thoughts like the path of a warped arrow
cannot be tamed
they follow a trajectory of their own making
skidding across the bow of a mind bent and warped**

**these notions fly in and out speeding past reason past
doubt
they give no warning they come without cause
they own the space we cannot define
within an errant mind**

**some slip by as simple ruminations
repetitious annoying pieces of detritus
others creep to the edge of compliance
ideas whose time should never come**

**and if they come they must be played out among the
stars
these thoughts cannot see full light of day
they harbour hideous prophecies
that dawn must suffocate and burn in the heat of sun**

"Look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under it..."

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 5)

She pinched her cheeks hard...a blush, girlish and charming, met them at the door...she danced them in like soldiers at a cotillion. Each tucked his senses into a seldom used pocket and fancied himself more than man enough to handle this aging hostess.

Effortlessly, she moved among them, a child-woman whose every desire was quickly met...whose charm exuded delight and innocence and in whose secret cache, tucked carefully behind a smile, purred a wicked anaconda with no blush, no desire save to squeeze and crush...thoroughly enjoying dinner for one.

"And take my milk for gall"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc.5)

**She shook her maternal instincts loose,
crumbs lightly caught on damask,
tossed them, children of the air,
to float and catch on lesser women.
Her seeds were thoughts, planted in him,
nurtured, threatened, cajoled and teased
by breasts that leaked ambition
and curdled at the touch.**

"...stop up the access and passage to remorse"

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 5)

**She was more acid than he thought...
able to burn holes in his conscience.
Her tirades were a practiced art,
a science of bitterness at her lot...
a life he gave her with no reprieve,
a step down from the top.
She used him as a vial,
a stoic, now quivering amid this bile
that filled him from head to foot.
He, a soldier, esteemed in combat, was,
in her midst, reduced to fodder,
a battering ram that would trip,
stumble and crown her with defeat.**

***"Come, thick night, And pall thee in the
dunest smoke of hell..."***

(Macbeth: Act I, Sc. 5)

**A moonless night trips over dusk
leaves no prints no walk to follow
nor contrail to view**

**There is no scent to track
pathways disappear in the dark
and we are left meandering**

**wandering routes that have no map
alleys that end in disaster
and passages that lead to nowhere**

**"False face must hide what the false heart
doth know..."**

(Macbeth: Act II, Sc.1)

**she painted her face with lies and promises
a courtesan cleverly disguising plans plots treasons
cheating all she met on the road to vengeance
a city she built in mind and memory**

**the buildings created were false fronts
film sets constructed of plywood and histories
rewritten scripts manufactured in fantasy an actor
on stages barely strong enough to sustain the
weight of a phoenix**

**a blackened heart hidden masterfully beneath
a loving smile a smile evolved over decades of
deception a smile fixed transfixed
over pointed teeth and blood red lips**

**it was beyond our ken to know the true from the
false**

"The moon is down..."

(Macbeth: Act II, Sc.1)

**An ecclesiastic moon,
huge eucharist
majestic in cathedral skies,
transfigures summer wind,
absolves
the night below.**

"Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?"

(Macbeth: Act II, Sc. 1)

**you were a vision long before reality set in
nothing beatific of course
but a dream sequence of sunshine and violets**

**it took little time before you strolled
out of the lovely pretense you created
picked up a knife carved from our lost lives
and held it against my throat**

**pressing the edge until just
enough of me trickled down the white
shirt of my insipid innocence to bleed
me into a stupor**

**years passed while you collected dues
peeled decades lost from my flesh
stripped me naked and danced across
my filleted carcass pretending for all
others to be the victim**

***"To show an unfelt sorrow is an office which
the false man does easily"***

(Macbeth: Act II, Sc. 2)

**It was easy to become the star of his own play.
He carefully dressed himself in cloth of gold
to dazzle an innocent audience.
His lines were memorized to perfection...
he had written them himself...
words simply flowed...
"o, the horror...o the pain...o what shall we do?...who
will lead us out of
this darkness?...o no, not in my house...how could this
be?...."**

**And when they applauded him...when they consoled
him...
When they placed the crown upon his head...o the
elegance...
o the surge of power...of prestige...
It was a showstopper...he could have broken out in
song...he could have
danced the night through.**

**As reality quickly climbed over excitement,
he realized that he had written a tragedy...
there was no music here...a dirge, perhaps...a song to
send
a man...a good man home to God...
And the orchestra in his head began to play a
repetitive piece...
a song to haunt him...
In his own horror, he refused to pen Act II.**

***"The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy
hums Hath rung night's yawning peal"***

(Macbeth: Act III, Sc. 2)

**once
the moon was easy to devour...
a crescent here**

**another there...
a half bite
and gone**

**swallowing the glow
seemed so simple then
letting it slide**

**past a quiet tongue
down a throat
empty of guile**

**there were no rules
of nocturnal etiquette
no sharing of communal plates**

**only faces upturned to sky...
banquets of light
that filled us**

***"While night's black agents to their prey do
rouse..."***

(Macbeth: Act III, Sc. 2)

**Night,
a panther,
all claws and teeth
hides in the crotch of a knotted tree
watching day slide beneath the horizon to sleep.
With fangs bared,
it slinks into every crevice,
every corner left by light,
claws its way between dusk and dawn;
a cunning companion to ambition gone foul.**

***"There's not a one of them but in his house I
keep a servant fee'd..."***

(Macbeth: Act III, Sc. 4)

**There is a price...
for truth, for silence, for all things.
Honor has cost and so does mercy,
for all its quality.
Love takes a toll and hate extracts
a bitter fee...
Pay now or pay later
there is nothing to satisfy while,
like Croesus,
coffers bulge and spill.
There is a price.
And, once paid, is forever owed.**

"...give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak..."

(Macbeth: Act IV, Sc. 3)

MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

A word that collapses in upon itself striking fear and awe...squeezing life from icy, stiff vocal chords, wrapping them in tiny cloaks of sorrow.

Blood, gallons of thick crimson, signaled the deed. An eerie silence created a community of mutes. Silently, they prayed...begged to hear words...any words.

Exclamations!!! Questions??? (((parenthetical phrases)))...Words, any words, words to break the unholy grip, to set them free of

MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!! MURDER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

"It is an accustomed action with her to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 1)

**She was a bit parenthetical,
(an afterthought) spending time in her own mind
wandering around its wilderness
seeking comfort from an untidy world.**

**She was a bit of extraneous matter
who absorbed the shapes and sounds of those
around her....blending into the wallpaper
of existence so easily and willingly**

**She was rather innocuous, never insinuating
herself into discussions never arguing this point
over that point always comfortably led
from morning until night.**

**It was such a shock when she exploded and
spit out the shrapnel of decades in silence
tattooing them with a needle-like precision, knocking
them down like so many pop-up figures in an arcade
game**

**After they led her away she retreated into her own
thoughts once again absorbing, blending, wandering
it didn't take long for them to forget that she had ever
been.**

"Out damn spot..."

(Macbeth: Act V. Sc. 1)

**It was not an imaginary cur she addressed.
Though in her rapid descent from sanity,
we guessed it might just be. Yelping, wild
and free, dogs escaping reality held her.**

They did not.

**Soon, we recognized the obsession.
Blood...blood...gallons of the viscous fluid
spurting from fingers, running down hands
seeking to freeze it.**

**Like red honey, tenacious and syrupy,
crimson digits awash in the stuff of life
stuck in her weakened mind.**

**Those thoughts, adhesive and gluey,
created an insipid conspiracy of blood
somehow suspended in air.**

"Look how she rubs her hands..."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 1)

**In one of those rare epiphanies,
the clouds,
like temporary cataracts,
blurred the moon.
Moonbeams divided a murderous sky,
twilight causeways
connected earth to air.
And, in one enormous bite,
day moved in,
a cannibal,
devouring the dark.**

"Look after her; Remove from her the means of all annoyance..."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 1)

**Her mind,
like pottery, lay broken,
She collected thoughts,
strewn across the room,
piecing them together
in random patterns,
a mosaic composed in a drunken dream.
Memory bled as the jagged edges
sliced her brain.**

"The soldiers he commands are only following orders. They don't fight because they love Macbeth. Now he seems too small to be a great king, like a midget trying to wear the robes of a giant."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 2)

**He had grown lean.
Once an oak among poplars,
he was now no more than a twig.**

**His spine could be snapped as easily
as a broken thought.**

**Legs that carried him into battle,
trained stallions working in unison,
were mere saplings barely able to stand
in a stiff wind.**

He had grown lean.

**The mind of a warrior, filled with visions
of wars won, replayed only this battle lost
amid simple arrogance and greed.**

Indeed, he had grown lean.

"Out, out, brief candle!..."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 5)

**When the moon's soft chin
hangs low when somber light
lies quietly beside still pines,
the nightingales
begin to stutter.**

**They sing staggered psalms,
try with aching wings
and arching voice
to lift the night,**

**raise the sagging face of an aging moon
and force
the sleeping pines
to dance.**

"Turn hell-hound turn"

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 8)

**Guilt,
the mangy cur,
gnawed at my resolve,
chewed through my conscience
and set about the arduous task
of howling in my head,
barking discontent
and sniffing every weakness
until I filled its bowl
with pieces of myself.**

"I bear a charmed life..."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 8)

**Of all the amulets
that could have hung about my neck:
potions that bring prosperity;
mandrake to give life to my bed;
garlic, spices and animal parts;
to bring to and to thwart,
they gave me riddles.
Oedipus with no sphinx,
a wife with hubris
and no blind seers to give
me answers to questions unasked.
I would climb mountains,
marry my mother,
kill my father,
if this charmed life they would
lift from me.**

"Canst thou minister to a diseased mind...."

(Macbeth: Act V, Sc. 3)

**It is so easy to convince ourselves
as we sit casually aside a cluttered desk
that we have gleaned the answers
some torn from a book
others stolen from a teacher
or gathered from years in practice
that we can fix those fractured minds**

**psyches lost to ugly memories
brains tortured and fragmented
thoughts convoluted and dissembled
trying to walk down paths they never knew
running frantically in circles
skipping through jagged streets
unpaved and filled with hidden potholes**

**so simple to toss out platitudes
so delicious to clutch the answers
parceling them out in 45 minute increments
to open the door and quickly close it
promising a better week
to let the next mind slide in as we sit
casually aside a still cluttered desk**



Kathleen Bryce Niles-Overton is Editor Emerita of the **Comstock Review**. A retired teacher and administrator, she was the principal of an Alternative to Expulsion for Weapons Possession School in Syracuse, New York. Currently, she is the CEO of the Bryce Focus Group, a PR firm in Buffalo, New York that specializes in non-profit arts organizations. The author of several chapbooks including: *Ashes From A Long Dead Fire* (nominated for a Pulitzer Prize); *Catechism of Regret* and *Parochial Habits*; she holds a BA & MA in English from the University of Albany; Ed.M. in Psychology from the University of Buffalo; and a CAS in Educational Administration from SUNY Oswego. She is the final judge for the Jessie Bryce Niles Chapbook Competition.