***Macbeth***

***Notes on Act 5, scenes 4-8***

**Scene 4:**

1. Malcolm realizes fully all that Macbeth has done. By stating his hope that everyone’s “...chambers will be safe”(2) in the coming days, he refers back to how his father was murdered while he slept (chambers = bedrooms).
2. The soldiers are ordered to cut down boughs and branches to use as camouflage, so that Macbeth’s scouts can’t see them coming. This is how Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane. The prophecy that made Macbeth over-confident because it seemed so impossible is now coming true.
3. Macbeth has been deserted by most of his followers.

**Scene 5:**

1. Macbeth is confident that his castle and forces are strong enough to fend off any attack.
2. After hearing a scream, Macbeth talks of how such things used to frighten him. But now, after all he has done, he is now familiar with terror (“I have supp’d full with horrors” 14).
3. Macbeth learns that his wife is dead (the scream probably came from a servant who discovered her body). His reaction to the news is important. Line 19 (“She should have died hereafter”) can mean two things:
4. She would have died eventually, like we all someday will
5. She should have died at a more convenient time when I wasn’t so busy

* Either way one looks at it, his response is quite cold. Performing so many evil deeds seems to have **dehumanized** him.
* He goes on to comment about what life means to him now (21-30). He sees it as hopeless and useless, a meaningless march towards death. The **simile** used here compares a person’s time on Earth to an actor’s time on a stage. Both, he thinks, are silly and have no real meaning.
* It is reported that Birnam Wood appears to be moving. Macbeth begins to “doubt” the witches, claiming that they have “lie(d) like truth”(49).
* To his credit, Macbeth refuses to run away and hide (53). For all the evil, negative things he may be, he remains a brave soldier. However, he admits he grows tired of the world, and wishes it were all destroyed. We see just how self-centered he is: if he cannot have his own way, he would rather have everyone and everything destroyed. His ambition is limitless.

**Scene 6:**

Malcolm and company arrive at the castle and begin the attack.

**Scenes 7-8:**

* Malcolm’s forces encounter little resistance as they overrun the castle.
* Macbeth is cornered (“They have me tied to a stake. I cannot fly,/ But bear like, I must fight the course”). He finally faces Macduff, who reveals that he “…was from his mother’s womb/Untimely ripped” (p. 107). Macbeth finally understands that the witches (“these juggling fiends”) have tricked him and contributed to his downfall.
* *A crucial question that emerges from the play concerns responsibility. To what extent is Macbeth responsible for his own downfall? How great a role did other characters - the witches, his wife and others – play in Macbeth’s demise?*
* Macbeth is killed by Macduff. Malcolm assumes his rightful place on the throne. He explains that Macbeth and his wife were responsible for all manner of discord and tyranny during their illegitimate rule. Malcolm commits to rebuilding the country.