

English 9

*Macbeth*: Study Questions for Act 5

5.1

1. What do the Doctor and the Gentlewoman observe in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking? What events does she seem to be replaying? Trace the language she uses back to its original context and compare and contrast her reactions now. Why is this happening in her sleep? Revisit her first prayers to the spirits in 1.5.

2. What does the Doctor conclude about Lady Macbeth's illness? Do you think he draws the correct conclusion about her based on the evidence?

5.2

1. How do things stand between Macbeth and his enemies? How do these enemies feel about their prospects as they prepare to lay siege to Dunsinane?

2. Angus notes that Macbeth feels "his title/ Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe/ Upon a dwarfish thief" (5.2.23-25). How has this metaphor (title as clothing) developed since the first time it has occurred?

5.3

1. How has Macbeth changed since we've last seen him in 4.1? How does he describe his current state?

2. How does Macbeth respond to the news of Lady Macbeth's madness?

5.4.

1. How do the events of this scene fulfill part of the witches' prophecy to Macbeth?

2. What other disadvantages do Macbeth's enemies ascribe to him?

5.5.

1. What does Macbeth mean when he says he has "almost forgot the taste of fears" (5.5.11)?

2. When he hears of Lady Macbeth's death, how does Macbeth react? What does this reaction say about him at this juncture of the play? If this is Macbeth's anagnorisis, what effect does it have on the audience? Explain this effect, in light of what you know about Aristotelian tragedy.

3. Reflect further on Macbeth's soliloquy (5.5.22-31). What is his current view of the world and his role in the world? Notice the language of time. How has he come to this moment? Do you sympathize with him?

4. How does Macbeth respond to the news that the prophecy is coming true?

5.6

(This scene gives updates on the action.)

5.7

1. Describe the encounter between Young Siward and Macbeth. What gives Macbeth confidence? Do you think his trust in this prophecy is reasonable? Recall Hecate's plan.

5.8

1. Macbeth proclaims that he will not "play the Roman fool," i.e. commit suicide (5.8.1). What is his reasoning for this?

2. Macbeth tries before and during most of the fight to persuade Macduff not to fight with him. Why might this be?

3. How do the two other prophecies combine to lead to Macbeth's downfall? How does Macbeth react once Macduff reveals he is not in fact "of woman born" in the conventional sense (5.8.16)?

4. What option to surrender does Macduff offer to Macbeth? How does Macbeth answer him?

5. How does the play end? What similarities do you see between the ending of this play and its beginning? Where is Fleance?