**Macbeth is purely responsible for his downfall. Do you agree?**

The play Macbeth by William Shakespeare explores the tragic downfall of a once heroic, honourable and trusted warrior as he makes decisions based on ambition that led to disastrous consequences. The audience is invited to consider who is at fault. Yet the response is not clear cut. After all, the idea that Macbeth can be ‘purely responsible’ for such an evil act ignores any extenuating circumstances: in this case, the ‘supernatural soliciting’ and Lady Macbeth’s premeditated plans. At the same time, to suggest that Macbeth did not have opportunity to stand strong and resist these temptations, is also wrong. It can be argued that whilst Macbeth was not ‘purely’ to blame he was ultimately the ‘master of his own fate’ and the responsibility for his tragic demise, must lie at his own feet.

Some critics claim that Macbeth cannot be seen as totally responsible for his demise because he was emotionally taunted and tempted to commit evil by his wife. It is an argument that suggests that Lady Macbeth is culpable because she was an accessory to the murder. Lady Macbeth represents an iconic literary figure of evil and manipulation. When she first receives the letter telling her of the witches prophecies, she is filled with a deep desire for greater power. Challenging the stereotypical views of the day, she calls upon the spirits to 'unsex' her and take her milk for gall. Her attitude is cold and calculating, foreshadowing the heinous crime of regicide that is about to unfold. In convincing her husband Macbeth to murder the king, she uses an extreme and shocking analogy of murdering innocence with the lines , she would “[dash] the brains out” of her newborn babe if he asked. Aware of her own power, she goads her faltering husbands through attacking his manhood. She taunts him with the idea that he is 'too full of the milk of human kindness' and she reminds him that he must look 'like the innocent flower but be the flower underneath.' Her manner is abrupt and urgent. She is responsible for the planning and initially, Macbeth's most trusted partner.

Yet despite Lady Macbeth's premeditated actions, Macbeth is not without fault. From the start of the prophecies, his ambitious nature is evident. The paradoxical line "this supernatural soliciting can not be ill, cannot be good' highlights his equivocation. When faced with such change in power status, he realises that he 'cannot wait for chance to crown him', but rather must take fate into his own hands. Nevertheless, the audience is fully aware of Macbeth's own deliberations. At one point he reflects upon the consequences and says he will “proceed no further in this business.” Yet his “vaulting ambition” gets the better of him and once the murder of Duncan is complete, Macbeth's murderous spree begins. He broods on his fears that Banquo's descendants and becomes paranoid about his political power eroding. As he begins to descend into an uncontrollable spiral of madness and further killing, the audience see a man who is both responsible for murder but also unable to cope with the events that transpire around him. One of these tragic events, is that of the death of his wife. Ironically, despite the tight relationship that they once shared, he is no longer able to feel love or indeed any emotion at all. In a bleak statement, he states that he has lost the 'taste of fear'.

Finally, perhaps with regard to the idea of culpability, it is important to explore the role of the witches and the supernatural. Shakespeare evokes horror in his Elizabethan audience through the use of witchcraft. He represents them as 'old hags' and 'weird sisters' with one of them murdering an innocent sailor just because his wife didn’t give the witch a chestnut. This kind of superfluous information does not exonerate Macbeth's actions but it does add to the Elizabethan belief that Macbeth was perhaps under some magical spell and therefore not totally culpable for his actions. From a modern-day perspective, there is little doubt, however, that relying on the excuse that the fortune tellers made him commit murder is weak. Their actions offer a strong catalyst to set the events of the play in motion, yet their appearance and strange rhyming couplets do not detract from the actions of the real 'butcher' of Scotland: that of Macbeth.

To form a conclusion on the guilt of Macbeth, it is possible to argue that the taunting and strategic planning of Lady Macbeth was a contributing factor to Macbeth's actions. It is also possible to recognise the magical confusion and greedy desire that the witches infused in Macbeth's mind with their strange prophecies, yet ultimately, the blame for Macbeth's personal downfall, must lie at his own feet. It is perhaps this conclusion that Macbeth himself arrives at as he prepares to fight to the tragic end.