

ENGLISH: *MACBETH*

'Macbeth is solely responsible for the death and destruction in the play. Do you agree?'

Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Macbeth* details the downfall of a once powerful, noble Scottish general. The plight of protagonist Macbeth is shown through the play, as his own desires combine with external influences to cause his undoing. Along this path, much death and destruction occurs. These are directly caused by Macbeth's own ambition, however he cannot be held solely responsible. The influence and prophecies of the malignant witches and the manipulative persuasion from Macbeth's wife, Lady Macbeth, also influence these events, and these characters should also be held as partially to blame.

From the beginning of the play, the witches are established as evil characters with enough power to predict and therefore influence the happenings of the play. From the first scene, where the witches are planning their later prophecy to Macbeth, they mention that they will play on trust, as this is 'mortal's chiefest enemy'. This planning shows that they are aware of the influence they will have over Macbeth, and are deliberately choosing to play on the flaws of human nature in order to see the destruction they value (shown as they repeatedly chant 'double double, toil and trouble!') take place. They then predict that Macbeth will be 'King hereafter' which sparks Macbeth's untameable ambition, a trait which leads him to many murders, and his own destruction. This further demonstrates the malignant desire of the witches. As Banquo later states, they present Macbeth with 'honest trifles' so they can 'betray in deepest consequence'. The three witches clearly and deliberately influence Macbeth's actions, meaning that they are partially to blame for the death and destruction he creates.

Lady Macbeth is also a deceptive character, who directly influences and even instigates the murder that Macbeth commits through manipulative persuasion. It is clear that Macbeth holds masculinity and the opinion of others as important, as shown when he insists that such praise should 'be worn in its newest gloss' and 'not cast aside'. This praise includes descriptions of him as 'valour's minion' and other terms associated with his prowess on the battlefield, a quality closely linked to masculinity. In order to bring about the death of Duncan, Lady Macbeth attacks this masculinity, claiming that when he 'durst do it, then you were a man!' and branding him as 'infirm of purpose'. These attacks, carefully created by Lady Macbeth to manipulate her husband through the masculinity he prides himself on, cause Macbeth to change his mind and decide to kill Duncan. This instance is an example of Lady Macbeth's persuasion directly bringing about the end of Duncan's life, an event which is the beginning of a series of other, more violent and fatal events later on. This shows that Lady Macbeth should also be held partially responsible for the death and destruction in the play.

Macbeth's own ambitious desire remains one of the key causes of the disaster that occurs. As soon as the witches prophecy to him, he admits that 'my thought, whose murder is yet but fantastical' already points toward regicide, without the influence of Lady Macbeth. Even after the initial push of the witches and Lady Macbeth's attacks, he himself identifies that he is left with only his 'vaulting ambition' as the main motivation to kill Duncan. He allows this quality to overtake him throughout the play, showing that though he is influenced by others, it is Macbeth who ultimately makes the conscious, willed decisions to destroy and kill. This is emphasised when he decides to murder Banquo and Fleance, a decision he does not share with Lady Macbeth, asking her to 'remain innocent of the knowledge'. The fact that he reaches this decision, like others, on his own shows that Macbeth should also be held responsible for the death and destruction that he directly creates.

It is true that Macbeth should shoulder the vast majority of the blame for the death and destruction that occurs in this tragedy. It is his conscious decisions to commit these crimes that lead to the collapse of his rule and the deaths of Duncan, Banquo, Young Siward and Macduff's family. Yet we cannot

overlook the vital role that the witches played in sparking Macbeth's initial ambition, the quality that grows and causes him to commit such acts. We must also consider Lady Macbeth, who not only comes up with the plan to murder Duncan, but also cleverly persuades Macbeth to carry it out. Though Macbeth holds the majority of the blame, the witches and his wife are also responsible in part. Macbeth is therefore not solely responsible for the death and destruction that occurs in the play.