

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Themes in Shakespeare

GUILT

Hamlet and Macbeth best exemplify the sense of guilt in Shakespeare. From the start of *Hamlet*, the protagonist is warned that a terrible murder has taken place at Elsinore, and made it clear that Hamlet must cleanse the place. Macbeth, and especially Lady Macbeth, feel increasingly corrupted and vulnerable, as time passes since they murdered the King. Lady Macbeth tries to out the 'damned spot' that is the reminder, on her hands, of the blood she has spilled. Hamlet does all he can to 'catch the conscience of the King, by putting on 'the play within a play,' but that is not enough, and there remains, in Hamlet's heart, the inexpugnable sense of being guilty (somehow) for his own father' death.

MACBETH Macbeth is a coward, who is haunted by the fear of the results of the deeds he has done, while his wife is up for anything, if it enhances her power. Unfortunately she suffers frightfully from bad conscience and personal anxiety after she has performed vile deeds. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are tortured by the desire for power, but are unable to deal with the consequences of their plots and actions.