



# Hamlet: A Guide to the Play (Greenwood Guides to Shakespeare)

*W. Thomas Maccary*

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Often regarded as Shakespeare's most complex and difficult play *Hamlet* is also one of his most popular. It has been performed countless times on the stage and has been produced in many film and television versions. Even those who have never read the complete play or seen a performance know a few lines of To be or not to be and the image of a young man contemplating the skull of his dead friend Yorick. The play continues to attract the attention of high school students and scholars alike and has generated a tremendous amount of criticism. Because *Hamlet* exists as text, performance, and cultural icon, only through a study of the play in these three different dimensions can Shakespeare's complex work be appreciated.

The purpose of this reference book is to introduce students and others first approaching *Hamlet* to the traditions of scholarship, criticism, and performance that it has inspired in four centuries. The volume gives close attention to the textual history of the play and to the historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which it emerged. Special attention is given to the religious, philosophical, and psychological aspects of the text. The book also treats Shakespeare's language, imagery, themes, and dramatic art, and it offers a summary of the play's critical reception. Throughout an attempt is made to visualize the play in performance, and constant reference is made to the conventions of staging in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

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