

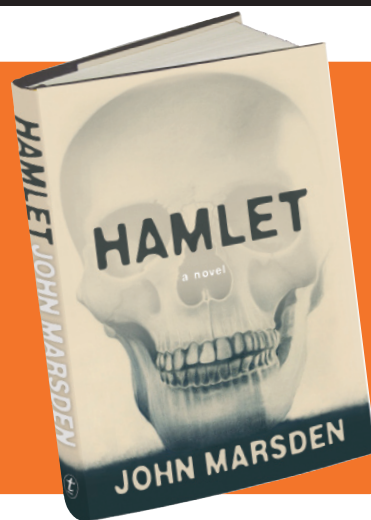
Hamlet, A Novel

John Marsden

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Praise for *Hamlet, A Novel*

'Marsden has brought his knowledge of the contours of a child's mind to bear, treading softly but boldly around Shakespeare's longest play. The result, like the original, is a compelling yarn that surprises most in its universality.' Louise Swinn, *Age*

About John Marsden

John Marsden's books have sold more than four million copies around the world. He is the author of thirty novels including the highly acclaimed series *Tomorrow*, *When the War Began* and *The Ellie Chronicles*. In recent years John has also been the principal of his own school, Candlebark, on the Tye Estate, an hour from Melbourne.

A reader's introduction to *Hamlet, A Novel*

In Elsinore, Denmark, the Crown Prince sits pushed into the furthest corner of the room. There is no escape from his situation. His father, the King, is dead. His mother has remarried his uncle. 'I don't believe in anything,' he tells his loyal friend, Horatio.

'But do you believe in ghosts?' Horatio asks. Hamlet does not answer. He decides to play footy instead.

Here is the beauty of John Marsden's retelling of *Hamlet*. He is faithful to the plot and themes of Shakespeare's version while sinking the reader into the inner world of his characters. The issues that haunt them are real and relevant.

On a cold night, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears and commands the boy to revenge his 'foul and unnatural murder'. Hamlet is trapped in a dark world, haunted by his father's expectations and his own questions of right and wrong. Should he kill Claudius? Is the ghost telling the truth? Is it man's place to play God? Is it right to seek justice through revenge? Why live when a great deal of life is about suffering? What happens to us after we die?

Such deliberations may have driven Hamlet to madness. He may be pretending to protect himself. Perhaps he simply cannot face a real discussion about the events.

Marsden explores the wider implications of the text whilst focusing on the painful isolation of being a teenager. Hamlet is confused by his desires and angered by the hypocrisy of his mother and step father. Horatio feels a deep love for his friend but cannot fully show this, constrained by the mores of the time. Ophelia is constrained, too. Desperate for intimacy with Hamlet she must act chastely.

Questions for discussion

1. How successful is Marsden's re-writing of Shakespeare's play? What notions of artistic endeavour are raised and challenged in this process. Discuss re-make versus adaptation.
2. 'These boys, with their hormones going crazy, wanting to press their bodies into girls, it's all they think of...They can't control themselves.' (p.48) By casting Hamlet as an adolescent, Marsden is able to explore the way boys are represented. Do you think adolescents are represented respectfully in the media.
3. 'They stepped between two opposing forces, like flies that buzz between the right hand of a man and his left. Now, the hands have slapped together.' (p.195) Death features prominently in *Hamlet, A Novel*. Are their times when it is condoned? Who bears the responsibility, those who inflicted it, or those who would have it done? How does this apply to current conflicts.
4. If someone who has committed murder is considered a beast, then do they deserve to be treated as such? Revenge versus mercy, which is the nobler in *Hamlet*?
5. 'I've had two fathers in four months, my uncle's suddenly my step-father, my mother's my aunt-by-marriage, my cousins are step-sisters, you think I should be normal after that?' (p.8) How does Hamlet's family situation directly affect his later actions? Would Hamlet have taken the path he does if his circumstances had been different?