

Summary of Act V of Hamlet

Scene I

Hamlet returns to Denmark after his voyage to England. Hamlet and Horatio enter a graveyard where a gravedigger is working. Hamlet tries to get the gravedigger to tell him whose grave it is, but fails. Hamlet then picks up a freshly-dug skull and inspects it. He then relates it to Alexander the Great's and Caesar's skulls after they died. Hamlet then learns that the skull belongs to Yorick, a jester Hamlet knew, but he did not recognize the skull after his death. A funeral procession approaches the three men and the grave. After an inquiry, Hamlet realizes that the body is Ophelia's. Laertes jumps into Ophelia's grave out of grief and blames Hamlet for his sister's death. Hamlet defends himself and the two fight, when Hamlet professes his love for Ophelia.

Scene II

Hamlet and Horatio are both inside the Danish palace, when Hamlet tells Horatio how he discovered the King's plot to kill him. Hamlet then proceeds to tell Horatio how he wrote a new letter and sealed it with his ring. He also told Horatio how the pirate ship attacked them.

Osrice, a messenger, enters and welcomes Hamlet back to Denmark. Aside to Horatio, Hamlet makes fun of the well-spoken Osrice and continues to taunt him. Osrice then tells Hamlet that the King wants Hamlet and Laertes to fence, and that a large bet has already been placed on the match. Hamlet then agrees to fence Laertes. A lord arrives to tell Hamlet of the immediate arrival of the King and Queen. When he leaves, Horatio voices his concerns, but Hamlet waves them away.

The King, Queen and Laertes enter, and Hamlet talks to Laertes and blames his own wrongs on his madness. Hamlet and Laertes begin to fight. Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine after Claudius tries to stop her. Hamlet is struck by the poisoned rapier and then he and Laertes lose their swords and in the scuffle accidentally exchange swords. Laertes is then wounded by the poisoned sword. The Queen collapses, as Laertes also realizes he has been poisoned and he too falls down. The Queen quickly dies from the poison, Laertes then tells Hamlet that both he and Hamlet are poisoned and that it was the King's doing. Hamlet stabs the King and then makes him drink the poisoned wine, and the King dies. Laertes also dies, asking forgiveness before his life is spent. Hamlet also dies after hearing of Fortinbras' arrival. Fortinbras and the English Ambassador enter. The ambassador tells Horatio that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio and Fortinbras make ready for Hamlet's, Laertes, the King's and the Queen's funeral and Fortinbras gets some of his captains to carry away Hamlet's body.