

Hamlet abbreviated

Act 5, Scene 1

Death

Situation: Ophelia has now drowned. Two gravediggers are preparing the gravesite for Ophelia as Hamlet and Horatio enter. Hamlet finds the skull of Yorick, his father's jester.

Gravedigger to another gravedigger

The coroner ruled that she doth deserve
A Christian burial though she did serve
Out her own salvation, so it seems. Say
She drowned herself in her own defense; it
Cannot be else. If one takes life that way
Wittingly, it argues the act doth fit.
But if the water comes to her, not sought
By her, she drowns not herself; then she's not
Guilty of her own cruel death that shortened
Her own favored life. The truth is if she
Weren't a gentlewoman, she'd not received
A Christian burial. 'Tis a pity
That great folk don't have more approval to
Drown themselves than their fellow Christians do.

The Gravedigger sings. Hamlet and Horatio enter.

HAMLET: Has this fellow no feeling of his business? He sings in grave-making.

HORATIO: Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

HAMLET: 'Tis e'en so.

The Gravedigger sings. He digs up a skull.

HAMLET: That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. This might be of a courtier, which could say "Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, sweet lord?" Might it not?

HORATIO: Ay, my lord.

The Gravedigger digs up more skulls.

HAMLET: There's another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his hair-splitting definitions now, his cases, and his tricks. Why does he suffer this mad knave now to knock him about the head with a dirty shovel and will not tell him of his action of battery? Whose grave's this, sirrah?