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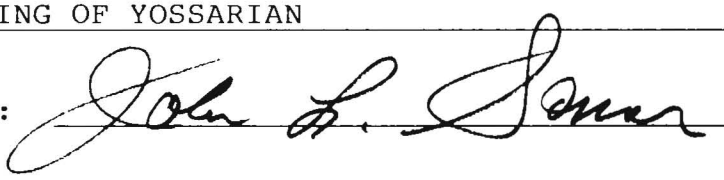
Title: STUDENTS OF LIFE: THE INDUCTIVE LEARNING OF OEDIPUS, THE INTUITIVE LEARNING OF HAMLET, AND THE CREATIVE LEARNING OF YOSSARIAN

Abstract approved: 

Learning is enigmatic; however, principles of learning are inherent in literature, and literary characters make excellent subjects for studying adult learning processes. Oedipus, Hamlet, and Yossarian encounter problems, respond to them, and eventually form resolutions that demonstrate the significance of their learning.

Oedipus is an inductive learner because he progresses gradually toward an absolute truth. He can solve riddles and problems if he remains rational, but he retreats often into an arrogant state. Early in the play, the prophet Teiresias tells Oedipus the truth, but Oedipus cannot accept the truth about himself until he has learned it through trial and error. After hearing the testimony of the herdsman, Oedipus

learns and thus is able to create a significant resolution; he blinds himself in an act of self-judgment.

Hamlet intuits his learning in a flash of enlightenment and then acts upon his learning. He is initially characterized as one who relies on external forms of order; thus, when he encounters problems such as the Ghost, he responds ineffectively. Until he learns how to act by forming a philosophy for internal guidance, Hamlet cannot combine his passion and intellect. Hamlet ultimately accepts his learning on three levels and responds with significant action.

Because Yossarian creates his own truth in a complicated, absurd society, he is a creative learner. Yossarian cannot deal with the problem of the war until he synthesizes his four internal qualities. As he confronts a series of problems, Yossarian learns to sharpen his intellect, to develop his conscience, to accept a faith, and to apply his imagination. He is then able to learn from Orr and form a qualitative resolution; he runs away.

The study of the learning patterns of these three characters provides a useful tool for literary analysis and also supplies an insight into adult learning.

STUDENTS OF LIFE: A STUDY OF THE INDUCTIVE LEARNING OF OEDIPUS, THE INTUITIVE LEARNING OF HAMLET, AND THE CREATIVE LEARNING OF YOSSARIAN

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Chapter 1

Learning Principles in Literature

Despite increasing advances in man's accomplishments, in his sophistication of ideas and in his ability to test those ideas, many mysteries remain about our world and certainly about ourselves. One of the most intriguing problems yet to be solved is that of how man learns. Scientists, educators, and even parents have marvelled at sudden changes in children and adults which indicate that they have learned, but how or why the learning has taken place continues to be unknown. Countless scientists and educators have created and tested theories of this phenomenon. In fact, an entire branch of psychology is devoted to the observation of behavior as a means of acquiring evidence about the learning process. Behaviorism has offered one way to study human learning, but because behaviorists experiment only with animals, they cannot offer a satisfactory answer to the question of how humans grow intellectually and emotionally.

The behaviorists' operating principle, that observing behavior leads to factual knowledge, has become a standard practice in studying learning. Children have been made subjects for the study of behavior because their environment

and actions can be more easily controlled than that of adults. As Jean Piaget demonstrates, many intricate details about the learning of infants and children can be extracted from observing their behavior.[1] Observing adults, however, is certainly more difficult. Their environment, especially their crucial past experience, cannot be scientifically controlled. Thus, the dilemma is clear--how can we learn anything significant about adult learning?

The solution to such a dilemma has been supplied by the finest authors of literature who with their extraordinary insight into the human condition are able to teach us about this process. Through their characters, authors provide us with examples of adults who learn. Characters in literature, therefore, make excellent subjects for studying how adults learn.

Those who study literature have long recognized the growth and change of literary characters. Gustav Freytag's model illustrates a method of tracing a character's change.[2] A play or story changes by conflict or climax. Through this process, a character is confronted with a problem, and he either faces it, solves it, or is destroyed by it. Implicit in most criticism is a study of how a character handles his problem, how he grows or how he learns. Most critics, however, are not concerned primarily with education alone, but with structure, theme, or images. As a result, there is little criticism that specifically address the problem of

learning or traces a character's complete learning process. Even studies of the Bildungsroman, a novel based on the psychological development of a character, are concerned with literary issues, rather than educational ones.[3] Recently, however, John L. Somer and George J. Thompson have studied the learning principles inherent in literature. Their unpublished manuscript, "Literature: A Model for Inquiry," illustrates how these learning principles are indigenous to literature, formulates from these principles a learning theory, and applies this theory to practical inquiry methods for the classroom. As such, it does suggest an approach to the study of adult learning.

For their purposes, the authors of "Literature: A Model for Inquiry" have created a terminology. They have borrowed terms from other disciplines, redefined terms for their purposes, and invented terms. Much of their work and many of their terms are irrelevant to this study, but some of the concepts are indispensable. In the following paragraphs I shall discuss and illustrate these important concepts: characterization, problem, tension, and response.

According to Somer and Thompson, a study of learning in literature must begin with an analysis of a character's initial personality. Before an author places a literary character into a learning situation, he defines his character's personality; in other words, he uses <u>characterization</u> to draw a picture of that character for the reader, much

like an artist paints a portrait. The author may establish this initial characterization in a variety of ways: by narrating information about the character, by having the character dream or communicate facts about himself, or by placing the character into his typical environment and giving him a conventional problem to solve. Whatever the means, the author must give his reader a sense of the character under study before a reader can examine how the character interacts with the world. An author's characterization also reveals his character's imagination, which Somer and Thompson define as a source of "the inner vision that helps us order and structure our experience."[4] When an author's characterization is complete, the quality of a character's imagination becomes observable, and the way his consciousness interacts with the world becomes measurable.

Somer and Thompson propose that one way to measure a character's interaction with the world is to study the types of problems that the author creates for him and then to examine the ways the character responds to those problems. They then proceed to define three types of problems: characterizing problems, complicating problems, and climactic problems. These three categories of problems serve their purpose of devising a pedagogical theory from literature, but for my study, I have added a fourth type of problem, the qualitative problem. All of these problems may occur in the form of a situation, character, or event.

The first set of problems a character faces helps establish his characterization. Characterizing problems usually allow a character to respond typically and successfully to his environment, thus establishing his habitual way of acting. Characterizing problems can be likened to a pre-test the author has prepared for his character. After enough characterizing problems have been introduced to establish characterization fully, the author creates complicating problems, those problems or complications which are unfamiliar to the character. Complicating problems challenge the character's "habitual" responses and may occur unexpectedly and forcefully.[5] While the character is facing complicating problems, the author builds the work to a climax and then suddenly introduces a climactic problem, a complication that tests a character's imagination with dramatic force and provides him with an opportunity to learn. After the character responds to the climactic problem, he may be confronted with a final type of problem--a qualitative problem--the problem that ultimately measures the quality of a character's learning. A character who solves the qualitative problem gains knowledge about the problem itself, and also about the significance of his learning. The qualitative problem is in effect then, the author's post-test for his character.

The four types of problems give a character a variety of increasingly complex opportunities to learn, and with the introduction of these problems, a character is presented

with tension. Authors create tension in as many different ways as they create problems, but the dominant characteristic of tension in literature is that it provides a character with the impetus to learn. When a character must deal with the tension that builds within him, which results from his problems, he is forced either to succeed or to fail, to grow or to retreat. The tension in a character often reaches its peak just as the work reaches its dramatic climax, but as this study will show, the peak of the tension to learn and the height of the dramatic climax may not be the same instance.

As each type of problem is introduced or as the tension builds, the character must respond in some way, perhaps by taking action, or by using a device to escape, ignore, or solve his problem.[6] A character's responses to characterizing problems reveal and define his character by "establishing [his] habitual" modes of action.[7] His responses to such characterizing problems are usually his conventional solutions with which he feels comfortable. A character's responses to complicating, climactic, and qualitative problems, however, illustrate his ability to go beyond his ordinary responses and to engage imaginatively with his environment; responses to these problems illustrate his ability to learn.

To do a comprehensive literary study of learning, one would need to examine a representative work from almost

every literary period, but I have chosen to deal with three justifiably important periods--Classical, Renaissance, and Contemporary--and I have selected a representative work from each of these periods. Sophocles' Oedipus the King, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and Joseph Heller's Catch-22 may seem markedly different, but they have a common characteristic which allows for a cohesive study of learning. Each of the main characters in the three works--Oedipus, Hamlet, and Yossarian--attempts to solve very specific, concrete problems, and each character, according to one critic, finally asks the same question about the significance of life and his existence.

Scholars have categorized Oedipus the King, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and Catch-22 as "similar," and they have discussed certain parallels among the three works. Although critics have not concerned themselves with the learning of these three characters, they have pointed out likenesses in theme and character. Howard J. Stark, in his article entitled "The Anatomy of Catch-22," claims that the cry that echoes through the novel--"'Why?' 'Why me?'"--is "the timeless cry of men in anguish and despair."[8] It is, Stark notes, "Job's cry, Oedipus' cry, and the cry of Hamlet and King Lear. . . . It is the cry that has permeated contemporary fiction."[9] Yossarian can find "no solace" in the gods of Oedipus' world; he is stranded in an absurd world in which the "existential cry of man--'Why?' 'Why me?'" is

twisted into a malicious answer: "'Why not?'"[10] Thus, according to Stark, the differences in the situations of Oedipus, Hamlet, and Yossarian are negligible.

On a more specific level, Michael J. Larsen discusses several ties between Catch-22 and some of Shakespeare's works. In his article, "Shakespearean Echoes in Catch-22," he notes a few parallels in character such as Piltchard and Wren as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and General P. P. Peckem as Fortinbras.[11] On close reflection of these similarities, Larsen says,

> we realize a deadly similarity . . . between Heller's world and Shakespeare's. . . .[T]he atmosphere of manipulation and deadly intrigue is just as poisonous in the modern bureaucracy as in the Renaissance court.[12]

Larsen also describes a connection between what haunts Hamlet's imagination, "'the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to' (III, i, 64-62)," and what is amplified in Catch-22: Yossarian is very much aware of every disease and danger that "might do him in."[13]

Finally, Ernest Jones, author of Hamlet and Oedipus, reaches a "psychoanalytical solution" to Hamlet's character with the use of Freud's Oedipus complex theory.[14] He discusses Hamlet's hesitancy as a direct result of his repressed emotions toward his mother and his confused feelings toward his uncle's marriage to his mother.

Themes and characters in these three works are comparable, as critics have noted, but an analysis of the learning principles in these works of vastly different historical periods will establish even more meaningful ties among these three great learners.

I shall first discuss each work individually by examining the characterization, problems, and responses of the major character, and then by analyzing the quality of that character's learning. After a study of the works individually, I shall draw comparisons and identify contrasts among the three characters' learning processes and discoveries.

Literature certainly provides the tool to measure the quality and significance of adult learning, and the starting points to begin such a measurement are contained in "Literature: A Model for Inquiry." Because the terms and concepts defined in this manuscript can be adapted for use in an objective and comprehensive analysis of a character, the next step in this study of learning is to apply the concepts to Oedipus the King.

Chapter 2

Oedipus the King: An Inductive Learner

> Yet I know this much:
> no sickness and no other thing will kill me.
> I would not have been saved from death if not
> for some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate
> go where it will. (ll. 1455-59)

Oedipus, as Sophocles portrays him in Oedipus the King, is one of the great tragic figures of the Classical Period. Not only is he a powerful dramatic figure, but he is also a great learner. As such, he can serve as an appropriate starting point for this study primarily because of the learning process that he goes through. His actions and experiences dramatize the learning process in part as Sophocles saw it.

Sophocles' version of the Oedipus myth has been the subject of extensive critical study, with concentration on diverse topics which range from such philosophical themes as destiny and self-discovery, to poetic explications of the choral odes.[15] Many scholars present the background of the myth of Oedipus and discuss the play's role in Greek tragedy.[16] Critics such as Richmond Lattimore and Alister Cameron focus on the plot in general and more specifically, on the process of the dramatic action, the "general story pattern of the lost one found."[17]

A common purpose among the critics is to analyze the intervention and power of the gods and to interpret why Oedipus suffers. C. M. Bowra, an authoritative Sophocles scholar, has placed the various justifications offered by scholars for Oedipus' "tragic collapse" into three categories: the House of Laius was cursed; Oedipus' pride results in punishment; and Oedipus makes a faulty mistake, a misjudgment.[18] Bowra believes, however, that Sophocles "intended to show the gods at work" and that "the play shows the power of the gods at every important turn . . ." Oedipus is simply a victim.[19] Despite the many thorough analyses of the play, including the recent in-depth scholarship of Charles Segal, studies regarding Oedipus as a learner are simply non-existent.[20] Although critics certainly cover what Oedipus learns in their discussion of the plot, and they debate why he learns in their interpretations of "fate," they do not trace how Oedipus learns. A gap is obvious, therefore, in studies of Oedipus the King; my purpose is to attempt to fill that gap by studying the learning process of one of the most intriguing characters of Greek tragedy. To analyze Oedipus' learning process, I shall establish Oedipus' character before he begins learning, his methods of learning, and his response to what he learns.

CHARACTERIZATION

Before Oedipus begins to learn, Sophocles establishes his characterization, and many scholars have noted the obviously important characteristics of Oedipus. C. M. Bowra, Richmond Lattimore, and Charles Segal have discussed easily-perceived distinctions of Oedipus as character. Bowra proposes that Oedipus is no tyrant, but a great king.[21] Lattimore concludes that Oedipus' "hasty temper" and "passionate reliance on quick judgments" make him rush to Delphi, run away to Thebes, and jump to conclusions during his inquiry. Lattimore also notes Oedipus' tendency to feel completely confident of his assumptions.[22] Segal makes this point about Oedipus' characterization: "Oedipus sums up all the essential paradoxes of man's nature."[23] These scholars, certainly among others, have made valid observations about how Oedipus is characterized, but they have not examined his learning potential.

My analysis of Oedipus' learning potential will reveal that he has two dominant responses to experience. In one sense Oedipus is a person open to experience and action, a man who moves smoothly from what he knows into the unknown. Oedipus has another side, however. He can be a prideful, impatient, and suspicious man. When he is surprised by events or information, he often chooses to rely on his assumptions about reality rather than the truth. In the

terms of this study, then Oedipus is generally engaged with the world. There are times, however, when his experience becomes so trying that he is unable to accept new knowledge, and he then regresses into the familiar world of his known and trusted views of reality.

Sophocles initially develops Oedipus' character by providing information about his background and past experience, and by developing characterizing problems for him. As the legend of Oedipus, the dialogue of the drama, and the characterizing problems of the play reveal, Oedipus' character has been shaped by the following influences: his attempt to defy the gods as a young man, his ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle, his tendency to let Jocasta influence him, and his inclination to presume loyalty.

The Greeks were fascinated by the myth of Oedipus, the tale of a young man who came to Thebes, a city whose king, Laius, had recently been killed. At the same time, the city was being held in a bondage of starvation and terror by the powerful Sphinx. Although many a divine prophet had tried to solve the riddle the Sphinx proposed, none had been able to discover the answer and free the city. Oedipus, an ordinary man, did what no holy prophet had been able to do; he alone solved the riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?" When Oedipus answered "man," the Sphinx killed herself, and Thebes was free. The city, out of gratitude,

respect, and the need for a king, offered the crown to Oedipus. He accepted the position of power and also married the ex-king's widow, Jocasta. According to the legend, Oedipus had children by Jocasta and reigned in prosperity for many years.[24]

Oedipus himself, in the course of the play, provides the missing pieces about his life before he came to Thebes.[25] As Oedipus tells Jocasta, he was reared in Corinth by King Polybus and his wife Merope. Always believing that they were his natural parents, Oedipus was troubled when a drunken man told him otherwise. When Oedipus confronted Polybus and Merope with the man's news, they reacted so furiously and emotionally that Oedipus grew suspicious; thus, he visited the shrine at Pytho to consult with the gods about his true heritage. The oracle did not relate what Oedipus asked to learn, but it did relate that Oedipus was cursed; he was doomed from birth to murder his father and commit incest with his mother. Oedipus was horrified, and in an attempt to escape his destiny, he fled to Thebes, without ever returning to Corinth. Oedipus, then, attempted to outwit the gods by leaving Corinth, assuming that his running away would alter the future evil. Part of Oedipus' characterization, therefore, is established before he even becomes Oedipus the King.

When Oedipus arrives in Thebes and solves the Sphinx's riddle, his decision to defy the gods is reinforced; he thinks he has discovered his true fate, which is to escape

the curse and become a revered ruler of Thebes. Oedipus' experience with the riddle serves to characterize him; it demonstrates his dual nature. On one hand, his ability to solve the riddle demonstrates Oedipus' reasoning powers and his capacity for confronting a problem. But on the other hand, Oedipus' success with the riddle and his ensuing peaceful reign as a respected king perpetuate his extreme self-confidence. Thebans believe strongly in Oedipus' innate abilities to rule and to solve problems, as the Priest relates:

> You came and by your coming saved our city,
> freed us from tribute which we paid of old
> to the Sphinx, cruel singer. . . .
>
> Now Oedipus, Greatest in all men's eyes,
> here falling at your feet we all entreat you,
> find us some strength for rescue. . . .
>
> Once you have brought us luck with happy omen;
> be no less now in fortune. (ll. 35-53)

Based on such praise and reinforcement from his people, Oedipus becomes a bold, self-satisfied ruler, and his prideful attitude comprises an essential part of Oedipus' characterization.

Oedipus' boldness is indeed reinforced by the Thebans, but it is also strongly influenced by his wife Jocasta, who is a strong-minded, defiant woman, and whose attitudes contribute to Oedipus' characterization.[26] When Jocasta is first introduced, she supplies characterizing background for Oedipus' nature, as she demonstrates her defiant and

blasphemous attitude toward the oracles: "So clear in this case were the oracles, / so clear and false. Give them no heed, I say" (ll. 723-24). Jocasta continually reassures Oedipus that any fears he may have about his fate are unfounded. At the climax of the drama, the herdsman reveals how Jocasta, like Oedipus, tried to escape the power of the gods by giving her cursed infant son to the shepherd and instructing him to abandon the child. Jocasta's effort to avert destiny and her flippant attitude toward the gods influence Oedipus during his reign as king and increase his pridefulness.

An additional influence on Oedipus' reign is the character of his brother-in-law, Creon. Creon is not naturally defiant and suspicious as are both Oedipus and Jocasta. Creon is, by contrast, a loyal and obedient servant to his king, and Oedipus seems accustomed to this type of reverential treatment from his family and subjects. Creon serves to illustrate Oedipus' tendency to presume loyalty and obedience. When his expectations about Creon and those like him are not met, Oedipus responds impatiently and pridefully. For example, when Creon does not provide the kind of answers Oedipus wants or expects to hear, Oedipus blames Creon directly--an irrational response. If, however, Creon does reinforce Oedipus' "habitual perspectives," then Oedipus responds reasonably.

With the use of the myth of Oedipus and how he came to Thebes, and with the use of Jocasta and Creon as influences upon Oedipus' personality, Sophocles has nearly completed a full characterization of Oedipus. It becomes apparent that Oedipus responds to his various problems either with arrogance and egotism and/or with a desire to deal with the problems and solve them. If Oedipus' ability to rule or his position as a king is challenged, he immediately becomes withdrawn from reality. Oedipus' past experiences have nurtured his belief in his inherent ability to solve any "riddle"; thus when he encounters unexpected obstacles to his success, he becomes irrational and impatient. However, as his solving of the Sphinx's riddle demonstrates, Oedipus is capable of being calm and rational, of remaining involved with a problem. His responses when in this rational state are not to ignore the problem, but to define it by intense probing and questioning and to do his best to solve it. If he remains in a learning state, a state of openness to experience, Oedipus is able to form hypotheses, gather evidence, confront the characterizing problems that Sophocles creates for him, and eventually solve them.

CHARACTERIZING PROBLEMS

Just as Oedipus' experience with the riddle demonstrates his dual nature, the first scene of the drama also

illustrates his ability to be both arrogant and open. Sophocles begins his play by presenting Oedipus with a characterizing problem--Thebes is suffering from a devastating plague. Oedipus' responses to this problem serve to complete the characterization of Oedipus for the audience.

Oedipus begins the play with a question: "Children, young sons and daughters of old Cadmus, / why do you sit here with your suppliant crowns?" (ll. 1-2). This initial inquiry is characteristic of Oedipus' perception of himself as a riddle-solver; however, Oedipus' openness is compromised because he already knows the answer: "but I have known the story before you told it / only too well" (ll. 59-60). Oedipus does not need to listen to the Priest's long description of the problem because he needs information; he listens possibly because he is flattered by the Priest's imploring him to save the city (ll. 14-57). Only after the Priest has sufficiently reinforced his egotism does Oedipus reveal that he has already made a decision about stopping the plague and that he has already acted; he has sent Creon to Apollo, to the Pythian temple, to discover what will end the city's suffering (ll. 70-3). Oedipus' arrogance is apparent in his assumption that saving the city will once again be dependent on his ability: "I sent . . . / Creon, . . . , to Apollo, / . . . / that he might learn there by what act or word I could save this city" (ll. 69-73) [my emphasis].

Creon, who has been sent to find out the source of the plague, takes longer on his errand than Oedipus thinks he should; therefore, Oedipus becomes impatient, which is clearly a characteristic of Oedipus' prideful state. Creon arrives directly after Oedipus complains, but before he will reveal his news, he asks Oedipus if the crowd gathered in front of the temple should be allowed to hear it. Oedipus' reply is that of both an open man and an overly confident ruler: "Speak it to all; / the grief I bear, I bear more for these / than for my own heart" (ll. 92-4).

The conversation between Oedipus and Creon which follows is also a characterizing problem that Sophocles creates for Oedipus. When Creon reports that Thebes must be "purified" of its pollution (ll. 95-8), Oedipus' love of riddle-solving is immediately triggered by this vague, mysterious introduction to the problem. Oedipus begins by responding with a series of logical, rational, progressive questions; "What is the rite / of purification? How shall it be done?" (l. 99). Oedipus continues in this engaging way, asking Creon questions and gradually defining the entire problem. The source of the plague, as Creon relates, is that the murder of Laius is unresolved; the murderer was never caught and punished at the time because the citizens were preoccupied by the Sphinx's hold on the city. The only witness to the murder, a servant of Laius' who later went to the country as a shepherd, said robbers committed the deed, but no further

evidence was found. Oedipus, then, has solved his first problem in the play. He has discovered, with the oracle's help, why Thebes is suffering from a plague. Full of his success, he addresses the next problem, the mystery of Laius' death. As a confident problem-solver and an arrogant ruler, Oedipus is sure that this "riddle" will be as easily solved as the one the Sphinx presented. Oedipus vows to "bring this [crime] to light again" (l. 133).

With the problem of the plague, Sophocles has presented Oedipus with another in a series of rather conventional problems, and with the use of them, the characterization of Oedipus has been well demonstrated. Oedipus is clearly a complicated character, which adds to audiences' fascination with him since the drama was first staged. Sophocles dramatizes Oedipus' intellect, values, and his typical responses to his environment, but what is most important to this study is the way Sophocles challenges Oedipus' habitual way of responding to his experience; such challenges initiate Oedipus' intellectual growth. Sophocles accomplishes this growth by the use of complicating, climactic, and qualitative problems. Also of great importance to this study is the way Oedipus responds when challenged by these three progressively more difficult types of problems. As Sophocles presents the problems, and as Oedipus confronts them, an obvious tension occurs. An analysis of this tension will reveal several aspects of the learning process as

Sophocles traces it through his character. This analysis will demonstrate the following characteristics of the theory of learning in Oedipus: truth is a given and stable quantity; an hypothesis and a step-by-step process are valuable to inquiry; and taking advantage of serendipity is crucial. Finally, this analysis will not only demonstrate what Oedipus learns and how he learns, but it will also demonstrate that he becomes aware of the quality of what he learns.

COMPLICATING PROBLEMS

The first complicating problem that Oedipus is presented with, the first problem that is unexpected and runs contrary to his experience and expectations, is his conversation with Teiresias, the old blind prophet, whom Oedipus sent for to help him solve the murder of Laius. Oedipus first reacts to his meeting with Teiresias with impatience because the prophet is late (ll. 288-9). When Teiresias does arrive, Oedipus continues to be arrogant, first by re-telling the oracle for the prophet, despite the fact that Teiresias already knows directly from the gods what must be done to stop the plague. Although Oedipus was also impatient with Creon's delay, he is initially open to experience during their scene because his curiosity and interest are piqued; eventually, however, Oedipus becomes arrogant in this scene because Teiresias refuses to tell him what he knows. The

blind prophet confronts Oedipus with a difficult complication when he states:

> I will not bring this pain upon us both,
> neither on you nor on myself. Why is it
> you question me and waste your labour? I
> will tell you nothing. (ll. 332-34)

Teiresias' decision not to talk presents Oedipus with two options. Oedipus can proceed with a rational inquiry and try to discover why Teiresias chooses not to help him. If Oedipus becomes engaged with the problem, he may logically infer that such a wise man as Teiresias must have a good reason for withholding valuable information about a crime; therefore, Oedipus could make it a "riddle" to be solved by means of discovery. Oedipus can also go the opposite direction and fall back on his pride to guide him rather than his intellect.

Oedipus' chosen response is immediately apparent, as he grows angry and impatient: "You would provoke a stone! Tell us, you villain, / tell us, and do not stand there quietly / unmoved and balking at the issue" (ll. 335-6). Had Oedipus remained open and engaged with his experience, he would have become interested in the prophet's reasons for withholding evidence, not angry at his actions. Oedipus is only concerned with the challenge Teiresias presents to his past experience as a respected and successful ruler, thus he resorts to accusing Teiresias himself of the murder of Laius:

> Indeed I am
> so angry I shall not hold back a jot
> of what I think. For I would have you know
> I think you were complotter of the deed
> and doer of the deed save in so far
> as for the actual killing. Had you had eyes
> I would have said you alone murdered him.
> (ll. 345-9)

When Oedipus' ego is wounded, when his authority to rule and command is challenged, and when his impeccable reputation is questioned, he is diverted from a real problem and withdraws into the comfortable world of his own imagination; he relies only on what his own mind and experience tell him is reality. From his own experience with the gods, he knows men contrive and scheme. Confronted with the mystery of Teiresias' obstinancy, Oedipus falls back on his habitual assumptions rather than reaching further into the unknown.

Teiresias responds to Oedipus' charge with the truth: " . . . you are the land's pollution" (l. 353). Teiresias has once again attacked Oedipus' ego, and because he is already in an arrogant state, Oedipus cannot hear the truth. Oedipus' response, therefore, is to be impatient and to make more accusations: "How shamelessly you started up this taunt! / How do you think you will escape?" (l. 355). Teiresias must repeat the truth because Oedipus' expectations have been so shattered by what the prophet says that he cannot even comprehend the meaning. Oedipus says, "I did not grasp it, / not so to call it known. Say it again"

(l. 361). Teiresias could repeat the truth numerous times and the significance of it would still not occur to Oedipus because at this point, his imagination is not capable of integrating what Teiresias says.

Had Oedipus questioned Teiresias' refusal to talk earlier, had he patiently followed the line of questions that this inquiry would have suggested, he might have had a better chance of absorbing Teiresias' horrible truth. However, he is incapable of accepting this reality and relies on what he knows--politics--and forms a false hypothesis that Creon must have collaborated with Teiresias and persuaded the prophet to implicate Oedipus in the murder of Laius. Oedipus has no evidence on which to base his hypothesis about Creon, and he makes no attempt to gather evidence for his theory. He simply retreats into assumption and arrogance because his authority and reputation are endangered. Even when Teiresias speaks in "riddles," which normally would cause Oedipus to respond intellectually, Oedipus reacts defensively:

> Teiresias
> 'This day will show your birth and will destroy you.'
>
> Oedipus
> 'How needlessly your riddles darken everything.'
>
> Teiresias
> 'But it's in riddle answering you are strongest.'
>
> Oedipus
> 'Yes. Taunt me where you will find me great.'
> (ll. 438-41)

Teiresias, whose knowledge has presented Oedipus with the truth and thus his problem of learning, departs after prophesying doom for Oedipus. Sophocles then presents Oedipus with his second complication.

When Creon hears that Oedipus has accused him of treason, he confronts Oedipus and attempts to defend himself, but Oedipus is firm in his belief: " . . . don't tell me that you are not guilty" (l. 548). Despite Creon's long, logical speech about why he has no reason to dethrone Oedipus, the haughty king wonders how he can "counterplot" against Creon by having him killed (ll. 618-25). As the argument between Oedipus and Creon gains force, Jocasta, wife of Oedipus and sister to Creon, enters to try and help settle their quarrel (l. 633). Although it is no easy task, the Chorus and Jocasta finally persuade Oedipus to spare Creon's life. Oedipus eventually lets Creon escape, physically unharmed, but Oedipus makes it clear to the Chorus that he spares Creon only for its sake: "It is your lips that prayed for him I pitied, / not his; wherever he is, I shall hate him" (ll. 671-2). Oedipus, therefore, maintains his false hypothesis about Creon, but does not act on it. The Chorus and Jocasta know how to deal with Oedipus' anger and impatience; they apparently have had to calm him before. Because they appeal to his sense of justice as a ruler and ask him to drop the matter of Creon for the city's sake, Oedipus complies. His lengthy debate with Creon accomplishes

nothing toward solving the murder of Laius; it only serves to show once again Oedipus' arrogance. Oedipus demonstrates how a learner can be distracted from his task when he ignores the true problems reality presents him.

After Creon leaves, Jocasta insists that Oedipus tell her what began the quarrel. Oedipus explains what he thinks is the truth: "Creon says / that I'm the murderer of Laius . . . . He sent this rascal prophet to me, since / he keeps his own mouth clean of any guilt" (ll. 703-06). With Jocasta's response and the discussion which follows, Oedipus is presented with his next complicating problem. Sophocles provides Oedipus with another opportunity to deal with the problem of Laius' murder; he has yet another chance.

Jocasta's immediate response to Oedipus' anxiety is to reassure him that he has nothing to worry about; her characteristic disbelief and defiance of the gods comes through clearly in her advice to Oedipus:

> Do not concern yourself about this matter;
> listen to me and learn that human beings
> have no part in the craft of prophecy.
> Of that I'll show you a short proof. (ll. 706-10)

Jocasta's proof is an experience she once had with an oracle who told Laius that he would die by the hand of his and Jocasta's son; she also explains how Laius actually died and that their infant son was killed to frustrate the oracle. As Jocasta concludes, completely assured that the gods who were wrong once are wrong again, Oedipus has a strong

reaction to her "teaching": "O dear Jocasta, / as I hear this from you, there comes upon me / a wandering of the soul--I could run mad" (ll. 726-7). Unknowingly, Jocasta triggers something in Oedipus' memory when she says, "[T]he king, was killed by foreign highway robbers / at a place where three roads meet . . . " (ll. 715-6). Even though Jocasta goes on to say much more during this speech, Oedipus concentrates only on her words, "where three roads meet."[27] As soon as Jocasta confirms that Laius was indeed killed at a crossroads, Oedipus becomes engaged with the problem. An intuitive feeling activates Oedipus' learning, and he begins firing questions at Jocasta in an effort to synthesize her information about the murder with the facts Creon supplied, such as when it happened and why it was not investigated at the time.

The answers Oedipus gets from Jocasta serve to increase his rational approach to the problem. When he combines his own memories with Jocasta's information, he forms an hypothesis that he himself may be the murderer of Laius:

> O God, I think I have
> called curses on myself in ignorance. . . .
> I have a deadly fear
> that the old seer had eyes. (ll. 745-8)

The formation of this hypothesis is the key to Oedipus' learning process; once he begins to operate inductively as a way of coping with the pressure of the situation, then he begins to proceed rationally by testing that hypothesis.

When he questions Jocasta, he raises the possibility of interviewing the witness to Laius' murder, a shepherd. Because Oedipus is now in a learning state, he is able to make a calculated decision to send for the shepherd: "O dear Jocasta, I am full of fears / that I have spoken far too much; and therefore / I wish to see this shepherd" (l. 768). Jocasta guarantees that he will be sent for, but she demands to know precisely why Oedipus is so fearful after she presented her evidence that oracles are nothing to fear. Oedipus responds with the story of his journey to Thebes as a young man: he was running away from an oracle that claimed he would murder his father and have children by his mother. Oedipus goes on to confess that while on his way to Thebes, he did kill a man in a carriage and his companions at a place where three roads meet.

Oedipus does not want to recognize a connection between what the oracle told Laius and what the oracle told him because he is clinging to one hope. If the herdsman, who was a servant to Laius and the only witness to his murder, tells Oedipus what he once told Jocasta and says it was <u>robbers</u> who killed Laius instead of a man alone, then Oedipus will have assured his innocence.

At this point in the drama, Oedipus can consciously count the number of things he knows. First, he remembers what the oracle told him years before, and he remembers killing a group of men who would not let him pass at a

crossroads. He also knows the prophecy once told to Laius, and he has heard Jocasta's proclamation of disbelief in such oracles. Oedipus has listened to the instructions the oracle gave to Creon about solving the murder; he has gathered evidence about the murder from Creon and Jocasta; and, most importantly, he has heard the prophet Teiresias proclaim that he himself is responsible for the murder of Laius. Oedipus is apparently intellectually prepared, therefore, to move into the unknown and test Teiresias' prophecy.

If Oedipus remains in a learning state, then he can achieve and understand the information the shepherd can provide. Sophocles has built Oedipus' dynamic inquiry tension to such a climax that the tension will create movement--movement from the known to the unknown. While in a learning state, Oedipus' imagination can provide this movement, and it can accept new knowledge.

At this moment a messenger arrives who brings news from Corinth and thus provides yet another complicating problem for Oedipus. The messenger reveals that Polybus, the man who was a father to Oedipus, has died of natural causes. Instead of expressing grief for a loved one, Oedipus' first response is one of relief, even delight:

> Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one look to the Pythian hearth? Why should one look to the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied that I should kill my father! But he's dead . . . the oracles, as they stand--he's taken them away with him, they're dead as he himself is, and worthless. (ll. 964-72)

Oedipus' renewed arrogance and overconfidence cause him to create a false hypothesis that he did not murder his father. In the midst of this confident attitude, Oedipus suddenly remembers the other part of the oracle--that he would commit incest with his mother. This remembrance re-kindles Oedipus' fear, and Oedipus then explains to the messenger why he shall never return to Corinth:

> . . . Once on a time Loxias said
> that I should lie with my own mother and
> take on my hands the blood of my own father.
> And so for these long years I've lived away
> from Corinth . . . (ll. 994-8)

What the messenger reveals in reply to Oedipus' fear demonstrates that serendipity plays an important role in Oedipus' inquiry and in the theory of learning presented by Sophocles. Without the essential information that the messenger fortuitously provides, Oedipus would be slowed considerably in learning the truth about the murder of Laius. The messenger begins by saying to Oedipus, "Do you know / that all your fears are empty?" (l. 1014). This question arouses Oedipus' curiosity, and he begins asking the messenger a series of probing questions. The messenger teaches Oedipus, among other things, that Polybus and Merope of Corinth are not his real parents; rather, the infant Oedipus was given to the couple by the messenger himself, who took the abandoned infant from a shepherd and in doing so, the messenger saved the child's life: "I

loosed you; / the tendons of your feet were pierced and fettered,-- . . . So that from this you're called your present name" (ll. 1034-6). Even though the messenger's tale is unexpected and extraordinary, Oedipus believes him because his memory of having ankle pain as a child coincides with what the messenger relates. Oedipus is able to integrate what the messenger says with his own experience; thus he takes another step in his inductive learning process.

Oedipus responds to the messenger's information by excitedly creating the hypothesis that the real issue of his inquiry is his true parentage. He becomes so involved with this fortuitous discovery and the formation of his second hypothesis that he neglects his original investigation, which is to solve the murder of Laius. With the creation of his hypothesis, Oedipus chooses to ignore, at least temporarily, the gods' instructions to find the murderer of Laius. Oedipus feels, however, that he must trust his instincts, and they are clearly telling him to try to discover his true lineage. In this instance, Oedipus is willing to follow the line of questioning created by circumstances and to continue from that which he knows step-by-step, rather than recoiling from its implications.

CLIMACTIC PROBLEMS

It is at this point in the play that Sophocles introduces the climactic problems, Jocasta and the herdsman.

Because Sophocles has established Oedipus' character, demonstrating his weaknesses and strengths, his pride and curiosity, he is now ready to test Oedipus to see which of his traits dominates.

Oedipus' first action in the climax of the play is to find and interview the shepherd who gave him to the messenger when he was an infant. Oedipus questions the Chorus about the identity of this particular shepherd, and the Chorus responds:

> I think he is none other than the peasant
> whom you have sought to see already; but
> Jocasta here can tell us best of that. (ll. 1052-4)

When questioned by Oedipus, Jocasta's response demonstrates her inherent distrust of anything unknown:

> Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed;
> nor try to keep in mind what has been said.
> It will be wasted labour. (ll. 1056-8)

Jocasta reacts emotionally and irrationally because the messenger's information has supplied her with enough knowledge to foresee where Oedipus' inquiry is headed. Because of her fear of what Oedipus will discover, she tries to persuade him to stop his pursuit of the truth:

> I beg you--do not hunt this out--I beg you,
> if you have any care for your own life.
> What I am suffering is enough. (ll. 1060-1)

With this climactic problem, Oedipus once again has the opportunity to pursue a rational inquiry and try to discover why Jocasta reacts so emotionally to his sending for the shepherd. Like the situation with Teiresias, Oedipus has two optional responses; he can calmly question Jocasta, or he can simply avoid this chance to discover the truth that she knows. Oedipus' response is to misinterpret her meaning and assume that her only objection to the investigation is that he may discover his parents were of low birth. He becomes more determined, even stubborn: "I will not be persuaded to let be / the chance of finding out the whole thing clearly" (l. 1065). Because Jocasta disagrees with Oedipus so vehemently, his response is to be haughty and defiant with her, much like she has been with the gods. He declares, "Here, some one, go and fetch the shepherd for me; / and let her find joy in her rich family!: (l. 1070). Jocasta's strongly emotional reaction contradicts Oedipus' expectations of her response; because he has no prior experience to help him with his wife's defiance, he retreats once again into arrogance and egotism. Clearly Oedipus' encounter with new experience is fragile indeed. Unfortunately, Oedipus has the ability to fail his climactic test.

As a ruler, Oedipus is overconfident; this attitude contributes to his assumption that despite the possibility of having parents who were slaves, he will remain great:

> Break out what will! I at least shall be
> willing to see my ancestry, though humble.
> Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,
> for she has all a woman's high-flown pride.
> But I account myself a child of Fortune,
> beneficient Fortune, and I shall not be
> dishonoured. She's the mother from whom I
> spring . . . (ll. 1076-82)

This ironic and belated display of trust in Fortune is the first indication that Oedipus may be equal to his climactic test. After all, his problems began when he rejected the fate described by the oracle at Pytho when he was a young man. Such a reversal of attitudes--an acceptance of fate--would be necessary to prepare Oedipus now to confront any problem.

Soon after this display of trust in Fortune, an old man enters, and while Oedipus guesses that he is the long-awaited herdsman (ll. 1110-12), the herdsman also suspects why he has been summoned. As the climax of the play unfolds, it becomes apparent that the herdsman, who witnessed the murder of Laius, recognized Oedipus at that brutal crossroads scene, knew about the curse on him foretold years before, and made a decision to lie about the murder. By claiming that Laius was killed by a band of robbers, the herdsman protects himself; he hopes his disobedience in not killing the infant son of Laius and Jocasta will not be discovered.

When asked if he recognizes the messenger, the herdsman continues to try to protect himself and responds in the negative. The messenger then reminds him about a time years

before when a child passed between their hands (l. 1142). The herdsman's response is emotional, similar to Jocasta's: "Death take you! Won't you hold your tongue?" (l. 1146). The herdsman claims that the messenger "speaks out of his ignorance, without meaning" (l. 1151), and he refuses to answer Oedipus' questions. Oedipus is so intent upon extracting the truth from the herdsman, however, that he uses physical force to make the herdsman speak. Because of what Jocasta and the messenger have told him, Oedipus is convinced that the herdsman holds the key to salvaging his reputation and revealing his true identity; thus he is determined to carry on. Oedipus' concentration on discovering his parentage and his predisposition to prideful responses balance what he knows about facts and events. He is no more prepared for what the herdsman will tell him than he was for what Teiresias told him. The quality of Oedipus' character and the significance of his learning rest then on how Oedipus responds to the herdsman's shocking news.

The complication that the herdsman adds results in the climax of the drama--a revelation of self-knowledge for Oedipus the King and Oedipus the man. The herdsman finally supplies the unknown that Oedipus has sought and denied; he confesses that the child was Laius' and that he took it from Jocasta with instructions to abandon it, but he pitied the child and gave it to the messenger instead (l. 1179). Although the herdsman does not articulate the truth of Oedipus'

parentage and the consequences of his act, Oedipus' intellect is so engaged with the issue that he is able to make connections on his own.

In a flash of enlightenment, Oedipus integrates the one unknown that the herdsman provides with all his accumulated knowledge and past experience; he realizes, with growing horror, exactly who he is. With this enlightenment, Oedipus suddenly understands many other things about himself: that he has been defiant and disrespectful of the gods; that he has murdered his father Laius and committed incest with his mother Jocasta; and that he has falsely accused and shamefully misused Teiresias and Creon. Oedipus is also able to make connections with the future, as he realizes what his children's lives will be like as the offspring of an incestual relationship.

QUALITATIVE PROBLEM

With the integration and realization of what the herdsman's information means, Oedipus is able to comprehend the implications of his new knowledge and can relate it to his past, present, and future experiences. He is now ready to face the ultimate problem that Sophocles creates for him. Oedipus has a choice of how to respond to his new knowledge; therefore, he confronts a qualitative problem which measures the significance of his learning. When faced

with characterizing, complicating, or climactic problems, Oedipus responds in one of two ways; he either reacts arrogantly and defiantly or rationally and openly. Similarly, as he faces this qualitative problem, Oedipus, based on what we know about his past actions, will either retreat into his own mind or he will respond in a significant way which illustrates a uniquely human capacity for qualitative learning.

If Oedipus were to rely on his arrogance to deal with this qualitative test, he would probably deny the truth of the herdsman's information, just as he denied the truth of what Teiresias told him. He could try to defy fate once again, as he did when he ran away from Corinth. Oedipus, in a state of arrogance, may elect to have the herdsman and the messenger killed, or he could exert his ruling power and swear all those present to secrecy; he could even deny any understanding of Jocasta's suicide. All these possible responses would demonstrate Oedipus' typical haughtiness; however, Oedipus, at this crucial moment, does not respond by retreating into himself, but responds by taking action, not on others, but on himself:

> He tore the brooches--
> the gold chased brooches fastening her robe--
> away from her and lifting them up high
> dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out . . .
> (ll. 1268-70)

Oedipus blinds himself because of what he learns, why he learns, and the way he learns it. He learns that he is

guilty of many sins: sins of pride and arrogance, sins against his fellow man, and sins against the gods. He understands that because of his pride, he has been slow to learn and to accept the truth about himself through the knowledge of his subordinates. He can conceptualize how angry the gods must be with him and how they have planned his punishment. He also understands his disobedience; therefore the action he takes against himself is an act of self-judgment. Oedipus' learning has raised him to a cognitive level where he is capable of making a rational decision to punish himself; he responds to his qualitative problem with a qualitative, significant resolution.[28]

Oedipus' behavior, therefore, measures the quality of his learning. Oedipus does not act for reward, but for self-punishment, and only humans who have learned about themselves and about their environment are capable of this high level of understanding. Oedipus' resolution to cast judgment on himself also cannot result from his past experience, for he has had no similar experience in his past which required such self-knowledge. Oedipus' learning is a complex process, and his resolution to a qualitative problem illustrates the type of learning that only humans who can reach a level of self-knowledge and self-judgment are capable of.

Oedipus' learning is qualitative primarily because of the process he goes through to achieve it. Sophocles takes Oedipus through a process of four types of problems, and

each of these types--characterizing, complicating, climactic, and qualitative--illustrates clearly Oedipus' learning process. As Oedipus continually encounters problems it becomes evident that his major learning block is his inability to see the world and then imaginatively deal with it. When Oedipus' ego and reputation are challenged, his symptoms of arrogance and self-importance occur, which include a reliance on assumptions, a tendency to be blasphemous, a clinging to his own imagined reality, a disbelief of mystical or emotional evidence, and a tendency to be too rational or intellectually presumptuous. When Oedipus is in such a narrow state of mind, he cannot learn; he can only learn from other people's knowledge if he is open to experience and willing to pursue an inquiry. Oedipus' signs of being engaged with a problem are his use of probing, intelligent questions, his use of memory and experience, his willingness to change his mind or admit he is wrong, his receptiveness to empirical evidence, his ability to form an hypothesis and then collect evidence, and his openness to unlearn his old assumptions as quickly as he learns undeniable truths.

Sophocles presents three primary principles inherent in the theory of learning of Oedipus the King. First, Sophocles dramatizes a belief in absolute truth and the necessity of seeking that truth in order to become a "whole" and learned person. If man does not seek truth, or if he tries to avert his destiny, he will suffer at the hands of fate.

The theory of learning inherent in Sophocles' drama also includes a belief that absolute truth is most meaningfully achieved through a step-by-step process, a sequential pattern of learning. The third principle of learning in the play is the need for taking advantage of serendipity. A learner must be receptive to the clues and avenues to absolute truth that chance provides. Sophocles implies, through a character who undergoes a difficult learning process, that one must move forward towards truth, taking advantage of serendipity and surrendering to fate when forces require it.

Oedipus does learn through a gradual process, he does use the evidence that serendipity provides, and as such, he learns a significant lesson--that the gods control his fate and that one truth can change his entire perspective of life. Oedipus' ability to learn is certainly not unique. Oedipus is unique, however, in the way he learns, in what he learns, and especially in the way he responds to his learning. Oedipus the King is only one work, from one literary period, which demonstrates quality learning. The next work I shall examine, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, also shows that literary characters can teach us about human learning. Although the Classical period and the Renaissance period do not reveal the same attitudes and principles of learning, both Oedipus and Hamlet serve as models to trace a significant, meaningful learning process.

Chapter 3

Hamlet: The Intuitive Learner

> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
> When our deep plots do pall: and that
> should teach us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will. (V.ii. 8-11)

Hamlet is one of the great tragic figures of the Renaissance. According to many scholars, it is questionable whether Hamlet really learns in the play or whether he simply overcomes a profound state of melancholy.[29] However, it is my contention that Hamlet is one of the great models of learning. To defend this assertion, I shall examine Hamlet's characterization, the problems that complicate his character, those that climax his learning, and finally those that measure the effect of his change. Such an analysis of the play will show that Hamlet does change and that this change is a result of his learning. I hope to shed new light on the character of Hamlet by studying him strictly as a learner and by examining Shakespeare's ideas about learning as revealed in the play.

Among the mass of Hamlet criticism, that which is most useful to my study concentrates on Hamlet's character. A valuable work which summarizes many of the studies done on

Hamlet is that of C. S. Lewis, who divides the history of Hamlet criticism roughly into "three main schools or tendencies."[30] The first group maintains simply that Hamlet has not been given "adequate motives," and thus the play is flawed. The second school, Lewis explains, believes that Hamlet did not delay at all; he did what he could as soon as circumstances permitted action. The third group, in Lewis' view, includes "all those critics who admit that Hamlet procrastinates and who explain the procrastination by his psychology."[31] Great diversities exist within this third group, but Lewis contends that these critics claim to represent the central and "orthodox line of Hamlet criticism."[32]

A. C. Bradley also outlines the criticism of Hamlet's character; however, he makes four divisions rather than three.[33] The four categories are as follows: first, many critics assert that Hamlet's delay was due to external difficulties; second, others place Hamlet's difficulty on only one isolated element or situation; third, some scholars hold a "sentimental" view of Hamlet; and finally, many believe that Hamlet's "speculative habit of mind" causes his delay.[34] After he presents these four critical views, Bradley proceeds to dispute each one separately. Bradley contends that the direct cause of Hamlet's delay was due to "special circumstances,--a state of profound melancholy."[35]

While all of these studies are reasonable, well-respected, and authoritative, none of them examines Hamlet as a

learner. If these scholars would have done so, they would have had to revise their beliefs that Hamlet does not change substantially, and that what change does occur "comes too late."[36] Critics fail to recognize the clues which indicate that Hamlet has changed significantly because he has learned. It is my contention that Hamlet's off-stage voyage to England is an essential turning-point in the play. It is here that Hamlet's learning climaxes. When he returns to Elsinore, the results of his learning are observable, measurable, and certainly significant. In addition to demonstrating Hamlet's success as a learner, my analysis of his learning will also provide possible resolutions to many critical problems.

CHARACTERIZATION

Before establishing that Hamlet changes, I shall first determine his character at the beginning of the play. His characterization is one of the most complex in all of literature, and thus it is not easily analyzed. Part of the difficulty in analyzing Hamlet's characterization is that it may be reasonable to assume that he has changed before the play begins because of his father's death and his mother's sudden re-marriage. Bradley, for example, asserts that the Hamlet we see is not the Hamlet that the people of Denmark know and love.[37] Critics who support this proposition must rely on inferences from the play for their theories about

the Hamlet who exists before the death of his father. This assumption seems to be an unnecessary complication to an already vexing problem. Following the principle of Ockham's razor, I prefer the simpler idea that these trying events serve to magnify Hamlet's character traits; in other words, the tension Hamlet encounters exposes his traits and does not substantially alter his personality. The disruption of Hamlet's family, then, is a characterizing problem, one that I shall discuss following my study of Hamlet's characterization.

Hamlet's characterization extends far into the play and is tightly constructed of six dominant traits, all intertwined and related to one another. Before I analyze Hamlet as a learner, I shall identify and discuss each of his traits. First, Hamlet is a man who lives by the abstract dictates of decorum; second, he obeys the wishes of a concrete authority figure. Third, Hamlet possesses a witty and rational intellect that is profoundly challenged for the first time by the opening events of the play; fourth, he is inexperienced with such realities as death. Fifth, Hamlet has a sufficient amount of energy to act, but he is so accustomed to allowing decorum and conformity to shape and contain his energy that without such restraints, he uses his energy inappropriately. Finally, because of his years of satisfactory dependence upon decorum and obedience, Hamlet does not have a personal code of action. He is an

inexperienced intellectual who lacks an internal set of values and who is totally dependent on external forms of order.

Hamlet's attention to traditional modes of behavior is demonstrated first by his reaction to events that happened in Denmark just before the play begins. Hamlet's mother has wed Claudius very soon after her husband's death, and Claudius has assumed the throne left vacant by his brother's death. Hamlet considers his mother's behavior indecorous. He feels she went beyond the bounds of proper conduct, but he hesitates to voice his opinion. Hamlet also makes no effort to defy his uncle and usurp the throne. He has been taught, by his upbringing in the court, to respect those in power, particularly the King. Thus, once Claudius has the title and the position, Hamlet obeys proper decorum and allows his uncle to reign unchallenged. It is also Hamlet's attention to decorum that causes him to don an inky cloak and mourn his father's death for what he believes to be a proper length of time.

After the drama is well under way, Hamlet displays his decorous attitude once again when he gives the Players instructions to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action."[38] Although Hamlet gives these directions in the hope that the Players will perform convincingly, it is also another insight into Hamlet's awareness of what is suitable and proper. A final example of Hamlet's reliance on decorum

is his decision not to kill Claudius when Claudius is at prayer. Hamlet's father was not allowed shriving time (I. v. 76-79); thus to fulfill the dictates of decorum, Hamlet cannot in good conscience allow Claudius time for confession either.

In addition to his adherence to decorum, Hamlet is also an obedient son; the two characteristics are closely related. Although Hamlet is bitter about the marriage of his mother to Claudius, he complies immediately when the King and Queen request that he not return to Wittenburg (I.ii. 113-19). Hamlet's reply is one of obedience, even acquiescence (I.ii. 120). Hamlet's obedience is also apparent in his first soliloquy, as he concludes by saying simply, "But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue" (I.ii. 158). When the King makes the decision that Hamlet should be sent to England (IV.i. 29-32), Hamlet does not even question the resolution; again, he simply acquiesces. If Hamlet cannot bring himself to obey, he suffers from guilt, which illustrates how strongly his character is influenced by decorum and obedience. Hamlet's guilt for not fulfilling the instructions of the Ghost, an authority figure and a representative of his father, is revealed in the soliloquies of Acts II and IV.

Along with Hamlet's principal characteristics of conforming to traditional modes of conduct and obeying authority figures, he is also an intellectual.[39] He thinks of himself

as witty and philosophical, and he wants others to consider him "deep" and mysterious; for example, he tells the King and Queen: "But I have that within which passeth show" (I.ii. 85). Those like Ophelia who know Hamlet well perceive him to be a sophisticated intellectual. For example, when Hamlet feigns madness, Ophelia laments that his "noble mind" has been "o'erthrown" and that he seems to have lost his "noble and most sovereign reason" (III.i. 158-65). Hamlet's intellectual powers have been quite adequate before the problem of his father's death, but until then, his intellect was never substantially challenged by significant problems, either political or existential. As a young man growing up in the court, Hamlet surely displayed his wit and charm, and he used his intelligence in his studies. However, there was no tension in his environment which caused him to grow significantly. He was not pushed to achieve his full potential because he could always rely on either decorum or obedience to solve his problems. Therefore, all of his intellectual abilities--his capacity to solve problems, his leadership qualities, and his wit--are not directly useful to him when the world suddenly does not conform to his expectations.

Shakespeare makes it clear that Hamlet has the potential to solve problems and to be a leader. Hamlet uses a rational, progressive inquiry to gain information first about the Ghost (I.ii. 190-240) and later about the Players (II.ii. 327-28). Hamlet's natural, healthy curiosity is evidence of

his intelligence. Hamlet's second potential is demonstrated after the Players arrive; Hamlet shows his ability to create and put a plan into action. He not only writes the addition to "The Mouse-trap," but he also directs the dumb show and gives the actors specific directions as part of his plot:

> Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. . . . Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently. . . . And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. . . . (III.ii. 1-50)

Hamlet also has the intellectual potential to use his ready wit for profound self-expression. Hamlet uses language wittily, effectively, and artistically, but he also depends on language to try to cope with unfamiliar situations. For example, after the Ghost leaves Hamlet, the student in him surfaces, and Hamlet attempts to record the Ghost's message in his table-book. Hamlet's quick wit is particularly evident in this succinct reply to his companion: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (I.ii. 180-81). Hamlet does have a strong intellect, therefore, including the skills to solve problems rationally, to create plans, and to lead others. However, his intellectual potential has not been sufficiently exercised by his experience to prepare him to grapple with the difficult problems he is now faced with.

Despite Hamlet's intellectual potential, he is inexperienced. At the age of perhaps twenty-five or more, Hamlet is still a student, sheltered by the academic life at Wittenburg. Because he is unfamiliar with political scheming, Hamlet is shocked by the ruthlessness of Claudius. Hamlet also suffers "moral shock" when he is confronted with his mother's "true nature."[40] Hamlet's lack of understanding about his mother's taking of another man shows his naivete. Hamlet's lack of experience is most evident when his father dies. It is the closest that death has come to him. Hamlet's adoration of his father makes the reality of death even more difficult to confront.[41]

While Hamlet is characterized as decorous, obedient, reflective, and inexperienced he is also drawn as a character with sufficient energy to act. His problem, however, is that for most of his life he has allowed custom or authority to direct his energies. Because he lacks experience in the world, he has never used his mind to fashion for himself a code of conduct. Without an internal register, Hamlet misuses his energy and acts ineptly. This characteristic takes many different forms; it can be described as rashness, impulsiveness, impatience, irrationality, wrath, inexpedience, passion, or frustration. Whatever the adjective, Hamlet does not know how to determine appropriate action for himself. Shakespeare creates several scenes to illustrate this particular deficiency of Hamlet.

Some scenes demonstrate Hamlet's inability to contain his energy. In the second scene of Act I, Hamlet displays his displeasure with his father's death and mother's remarriage by moping around dressed in black. His form of bereavement offends the "new" court and does little to effect the changes he feels are needed. In the fourth scene of Act I, Hamlet makes a rash decision to follow the Ghost. Horatio, who knows Hamlet well, comments that Hamlet's rash action reflects his state of mind; he "waxes desperate with imagination" (I.iv. 87). Hamlet's mischanneled energy is revealed in "The Mouse-trap" scene as impatience. Instead of sitting back calmly to watch the performance and observe the King's reactions, Hamlet takes advantage of a break in the action to ask his mother how she likes the play and to explain the origin of the plot. Hamlet wants to insure that the King understands the implications, and Hamlet is too impatient to wait and see if evidence of the King's guilt will naturally appear.

Another form of Hamlet's deficient action is his failure to use his intellectual capacity for inquiry when he has an imperative reason to do so. For example, when he is with the Ghost the first time and then when he is with his mother, he loses his ability to inquire. While rationally and logically questioning the Ghost and also his mother would clear up many mysteries and solve future problems, Hamlet does not even recognize the possibility for this action.

Hamlet's ineffective combination of intellect and energy is also apparent in his misuse of language. After his meeting with the Ghost, Hamlet does not write the instructions of the Ghost, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v. 25). Instead he writes something poetical, illogical, and unsuited to the intensity of the situation: "one may smile . . . and be a villain" (I.v. 108). It is quite likely that Hamlet understands his problem with ineffective action and suspects early in the play that he may perform outrageous acts. Possibly, this is why he decides "to put an antic disposition on" (I.v. 172). By exaggerating what he realizes may be inappropriate behavior, Hamlet hopes to conceal his desperation.

Hamlet's first five characteristics--his decorousness, obedience, intellect, inexperience, and inexpedience--all combine to create his sixth characteristic: his lack of an internal code. Hamlet relies only on the external forms of decorum and authority for order in his life. When his mother shatters decorum, Hamlet becomes completely unsure of himself. With this loss, Hamlet begins to view the world as a fallen place:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. (I.ii. 133-37)

When Hamlet's belief in external codes of behavior is shattered, his lack of an internal code is clear. He has no personal way to make sense of his experience and sees his world as chaotic. As a result, he does not trust himself and is hesitant to pursue his own suspicions about Claudius. Hamlet apparently has suspected his uncle of murder--"O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" (I.v. 40-1)--but only the Ghost confirms Claudius' guilt, not Hamlet's attempt to learn the truth. Hamlet may be a student at Wittenburg, but he is not at Elsinore.

Through his extensive characterization, it becomes clear that before Hamlet can be intellectually and existentially independent, he has several deficiencies to overcome. He needs to learn when to rely on decorum and when to break from its strictures. Hamlet must discern when it is advisable and judicious to obey, and when he should assert his adult prerogatives. Hamlet must also learn to suit his words to the action. Hamlet needs to expand his experience by having more contact with the realities of politics and by coming to terms with death. Finally, Hamlet must create an internal set of values that will tell him <u>when</u> to act and most importantly, <u>how</u> to act appropriately. Hamlet must gain the capability of properly channeling his energy with his intellect.

To establish the most significant lessons Hamlet needs to learn--how to act and how to deal with death--Shakespeare

creates three foils and presents them as learning models for Hamlet. The First Player is a model for Hamlet because he can weep with emotion over the plight of a poetic character (II.ii) while Hamlet cannot even work up enough passion and energy to resolve a personal tragedy. Fortinbras, nephew to the King of Norway, is also a model for Hamlet; Fortinbras is characterized as decisive, assertive, and "king-like." Fortinbras has also lost a father, yet he wastes no time in mourning but moves to fulfill a purpose. Laertes is the most fully developed of the three models. In the same scene in which Hamlet obeys the request of Claudius and his mother to remain at Elsinore, Laertes asserts his wish to return to Paris and receives permission to do so. When he loses his father, Polonius, Laertes returns to Elsinore, ready to revenge his murder. Also, when his sister Ophelia dies, Laertes does not even pretend to mourn properly and decorously; he knows that his loss is so great that decorum is not a concern. Laertes, therefore, knows precisely what he wants to do, and he is able to carry out his own volition, in direct contrast to Hamlet's hesitation and indecisiveness.[42] These three foils also suggest that what Hamlet needs to learn is within the range of human experience.

THE CHARACTERIZING PROBLEM

To pull together Hamlet's five traits, to sharpen his character, and to show what Hamlet needs to learn,

Shakespeare opens the play by presenting Hamlet with "a pre-test," one specific characterizing problem: the death of his father "follow'd hard upon" by the marriage of his mother to his uncle. It is the problem of death that brings Hamlet's deficiencies to light and frustrates his habitual responses.

Without the guidance of decorum, his father, or experience, Hamlet responds to his characterizing problem by floundering in excessive grief; he is indecisive because he simply does not know what else to do. Hamlet could have responded by asserting his right to the throne. However, his characteristic deficiencies prevent him from taking such bold action. Of course, it is impossible to determine with confidence the events that led up to Claudius' taking of the throne. If Hamlet returned from Wittenburg to Denmark before the marriage, then he had the opportunity to voice his disapproval or even to forbid his mother from marrying Claudius. If he arrived after the wedding, Hamlet could still have claimed the throne, but the presumption would have been much greater. Nevertheless, Hamlet is so attuned to social decorum that he apparently never considered the possibility of Claudius' swift and direct action. Once the marriage takes place, Hamlet's habit of obedience does not allow him to rebel and upset the balance of Elsinore. Yet, it is plain that had Hamlet demanded his natural succession, the people of Denmark would have supported him, and he probably would have succeeded.

The characterizing problem serves to demonstrate Hamlet's need to learn how to act properly, which is tied directly to his need to learn how to deal with death. Intellectually, he must construct a philosophy that allows for death and for action, and emotionally he must embrace it. If he can gain this understanding, Hamlet will be capable of correct action and ultimately will be able to transcend his deficiencies. To see if Hamlet is capable of overcoming his faults and developing an internal code, we must study his complicating problems.

COMPLICATING PROBLEMS

Once he has established the need for Hamlet to learn, Shakespeare proceeds to present Hamlet with complicating problems which further challenge his habitual responses. As these problems mount in intensity and violence, Hamlet becomes prepared for the realization that he must learn how to act on his own. The complicating problems that lead to this realization are the Ghost, Claudius, and Polonius.

When the Ghost appears, Hamlet shows no trepidation but rather a fascination and a determination to follow and communicate with this apparition who looks like his father. As the Ghost describes the "foul" deed, he also indicates what should be done to vindicate the murder of Hamlet's father. The Ghost gives Hamlet direct instructions, "Revenge his

foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v. 25); thus he supplies Hamlet's first complicating problem. By introducing Hamlet to a problem that requires immediate, direct, and personal action, the Ghost complicates Hamlet's already troubled life. Hamlet responds to the complicating problem of the Ghost habitually and finally ineptly. Hamlet's first response to the Ghost's revelation is to vow that he, "with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to [his] revenge? (I.v. 29-31). Hamlet initially responds in character, as one dependent on language but one who uses language inappropriately. Hamlet's next response is to write a reminder in his table-book; then, he swears his companions to secrecy about the Ghost; and finally, he puts "an antic disposition on" (I.v. 172). Because of his dependence on language, Hamlet tries to gain control of the problem by dealing with it first on the level of words. He records what he thinks the import of the Ghost's speech is, and he relies on the spoken word to insure the faithfulness of his friends (I.v. 157-60). These two decisions show that Hamlet has the potential to be decisive, but after he has made these decisions, he does not know what else to do. Hamlet's ability to apply his intellect recedes, and his inexperience prevents him from taking a purposeful direction toward solving the problem of revenge. Hamlet cannot act primarily because his experiences simply have not prepared him for the ultimate issues that the Ghost confronts him with. His

final response, instead of purposeful action, is to fake madness in an attempt to deceive the court. Hamlet's deluded belief that his masquerading and manipulating will provide him a solution to this problem actually inhibits and prolongs its resolution. Although he may believe that his words and his plan are deviously witty, once again, all of Hamlet's responses are inappropriate to the situation.

Hamlet's second complicating problem provides him the first opportunity to fulfill the Ghost's instructions, and his failure to act consequently demonstrates his inability to act at all even when he has reason and opportunity to do so. This problem occurs in the third scene of Act III, when Hamlet discovers Claudius alone on his knees. Hamlet immediately recognizes the opportunity, "Now might I do it pat" (III.iii. 73), and he has justification for killing Claudius, but he pauses to weigh the situation, to measure and consider it with words, his characteristic first response to a problem:

> And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;
> And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:
> . . . am I then revenged,
> To take him in the purging of his soul,
> When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
> No! (III.iii. 74-87)

Hamlet's response is determined by an over-emphasis on his intellect and on decorum. He rationalizes away the opportunity to act, and his basis for not acting stems from his attention to decorum: he must not allow Claudius time for

confession since Claudius did not allow King Hamlet such courtesy. If Hamlet can catch the King "drunk asleep, or in his rage, / Or in the incentuous [sic] pleasure of his bed" (III.iii. 89-90), then Hamlet can fulfill decorum, feel completely justified, and be at ease intellectually.

One of the great ironies of the play is that Claudius, though on his knees, is not truly praying. Therefore, had Hamlet's natural passion and energy incited immediate action, justice would have been served. An additional irony is that Hamlet initially sought evidence to convict Claudius besides what the Ghost told him. However, he seeks no evidence to determine whether or not Claudius is indeed praying. Although Hamlet's response does show his rationalization, he does not use his intellectual capacity for inquiry nor does he seek evidence through his senses. Hamlet is so confused by this sudden opportunity to fulfill the Ghost's instructions that his strong sense of decorum and his over-rationalization cancel his natural energy; the result is a misjudged decision and improper action.

Hamlet's third complicating problem, which takes place in the Queen's closet (III.iv.), presents him with yet another opportunity to prove himself both an apt judge and executor of proper action. Whereas Hamlet's complicating problem with Claudius demonstrates how Hamlet's sense of decorum controls, and even limits, his passion, his third complicating problem illustrates how chaotic his actions are

when uncontained by decorum. In this scene, Hamlet begins a rebuke of the Queen, blaming her for all the problems of Elsinore, and she, recognizing his rage, is startled by his mood. When she cries out, Polonius echoes her cry from behind the arras (III.iv. 23). Hamlet, without making any attempt to discover his identity, slays Polonius through the arras. Hamlet's response is to act, indeed, but his justifiable reasons for such action are practically non-existent. He probably thinks he has caught Claudius in his incestuous bed, but in this scene, Hamlet does not even begin to assess the situation or to rationalize about the possible consequences of drawing his sword. Although he had the opportunity, Hamlet does not look behind the arras before he stabs. He does not inquire into the problem before he tries to solve it; he is not even alert to his senses. Confronted with this third problem, Hamlet allows his energetic passion to escape, unchanneled through reason or decorum. Although Hamlet's response is contrary to his response with Claudius, the result is the same. He has acted inappropriately.

Hamlet's confusion, frustration, and contradictory responses when confronted by three complicating problems demonstrate that he still has not created an internal set of values for himself; he still has not learned how to act. His complicating problems increase his sense of guilt for acting improperly, but they do not change him nor lead him to the formation of an internal code of action. Therefore,

Hamlet's learning must build to a climax so that Hamlet will have a final chance to grow, to combine his intellectual powers with his natural energy, thereby creating a center of knowledge.

THE CLIMACTIC PROBLEM

Shakespeare, after fully characterizing Hamlet and then complicating his traditional modes of behavior, presents him with the ultimate test of the drama; he places Hamlet in a climactic learning situation to see which of his paradoxical traits may dominate and to test his potential for remaining in a learning state. Hamlet's climactic problem, ironically, does not coincide with a dramatic climax. It occurs off-stage while Act IV, scene v is progressing. Hamlet's typical responses and dominant characteristics are challenged when he is at sea, sent from Elsinore and bound for England because of his crazed behavior and his murder of Polonius. The audience does not learn about what Hamlet experienced on the ship until he narrates it to Horatio (V.ii. 1-80).

By the time Hamlet is sent to England, he knows a number of things. He knows that the Ghost instructed him to revenge his father's murder. He knows that he was slow to act, but he finally produced the play to entrap the King. Hamlet knows that the King's reactions to the play imply guilt; thus he gains more proof than what the Ghost told him.

Hamlet also knows that his one physical action was wrong; he killed Polonius, an innocent man. In addition, Hamlet knows that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are more loyal to the King than to him. Before he is sent on the ship, all of these ideas exist in Hamlet's mind in a state of incubation. In other words, they are separate and diverse bits of information. However, when he is sent away from Elsinore with its crushing problems, Hamlet has the time and distance necessary to synthesize these ideas. Hamlet becomes engaged with the problem of discovering if there is a plot against his life.

The first night on the ship, Hamlet was bothered by sleeplessness: "in my heart there was a king of fighting" (V.ii. 4). Because of this intuitive feeling, something Hamlet did not act upon with Claudius, Hamlet is moved to steal a document courageously and secretly from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and to take it back to his quarters. He discovers from it that he is to be killed upon arrival in England (V.ii. 19-24). Hamlet remains engaged with this problem and quickly forms a plan and acts on it. Because of his skill with language, the first step in Hamlet's plan is on the level of words; he creates a new document. Hamlet's revision of the order causes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be put to death, but Hamlet feels that he has sufficient evidence, written proof, of their guilt; thus he feels no remorse about causing their death: "They are not near my conscience; their defeat / Does by their own insinuation

grow" (V.ii. 58-9). Hamlet, with his revision of the document, has performed a significant action, the kind of act he should have performed when his father died.

Hamlet does not naively trust that he is safe after his forgery, but he stays engaged with the problem so that when the opportunity arises, he can act again to insure his safety. A chance for Hamlet's escape does appear, and because he is engaged and prepared for this chance, he craftily boards a pirate ship during a fight between the two vessels (IV.v. 18). Although the appearance of the ship is a stroke of luck, Hamlet's boarding it is no accident. He is ready. Moreover, he disobeys Claudius for the first time in the play. His courage to return to Elsinore is evident, as he offers to do the pirates a "good turn" if they will take him back to Denmark. Hamlet, therefore, has shown that he is capable of becoming and staying engaged with a problem until he has formulated some sort of solution. He has also demonstrated his decisiveness and his ability to protect his own life in a situation of tension and conflict. The circumstances of this situation teach Hamlet <u>not</u> to do <u>nothing,</u> but to act with a specific purpose in mind.

Characteristically, Hamlet's first response to his climactic problem, is not physical, but is based on a manipulation of words, and the result is indirect. He certainly uses his rationality in deciding that he should forge the King's order, and he uses his skill with language to carry

out that decision. The significance of Hamlet's action, however, is that he also uses his intellect to channel his energy, which has been the missing element in Hamlet's success. On the ship, therefore, Hamlet acts appropriately; he uses the correct proportions of intellect and passion to achieve proper action. He is finally able to integrate his strongest characteristics.

Once Hamlet is removed from the surroundings of the castle--the decorum, the confusion, the bitterness--he is able to gain a clearer perspective of himself, his mistakes, and his options. He is able to use hindsight to reconsider the Ghost's revelation and his own responses. From the time the Ghost first appears, Hamlet has plenty of time to incubate his problem, to let it dwell in his subconscious; therefore, when he is away from Elsinore and confronted with death a second time, his own impending death, enough tension exists in Hamlet's mind to cause his subconscious learning to spring to consciousness and create an experience of illumination. Hamlet learns, then, in a flash of enlightenment. Hamlet's lack of experience and internal values make him incapable of learning in a sequential process; therefore, he learns all at once. After experiencing all of the problems that Shakespeare confronts him with, he finally realizes what he needs--to be ready--and this realization forms the basis of Hamlet's philosophy, his internal values, and marks the end of his dominant deficiencies. Hamlet has learned to

act in the face of death. For his learning to have significance, though, Hamlet must be presented with a "post-test," qualitative problems, those that will measure the depth and significance of his learning.

QUALITATIVE PROBLEMS

Shakespeare's final challenge for Hamlet is that of the qualitative problems. They will determine whether or not Hamlet can apply his learning to any situation, not just one in which he tries to avert his own death. Hamlet must reaffirm what he learned off-stage because the experience on the ship was only one incident, not a satisfactory measurement of whether Hamlet can appropriately and consistently apply his learning to the problem of the Ghost's command. Because Hamlet has been quite unpredictable in the past, it is questionable whether he can put what he has learned to work again and effectively combine his intellect and energy. Therefore, to fulfill the elements of drama and to demonstrate his capacity for significant learning, Hamlet must meet the challenge of the qualitative problems. Six problems comprise Hamlet's post-test, and they occur in rapid succession as they increase in significance. Hamlet confronts three qualitative problems in the graveyard that measure his ability to act.

The graveyard scene provides an opportunity for Hamlet to come to terms with death on three levels of intensity while it also provides the tension Hamlet needs to move from his intellectual understanding of death to a physical and emotional understanding as well. Hamlet must learn to face the realities of death before he can face the realities of life.

Hamlet's qualitative problems begin as he and Horatio approach the churchyard, soon after Hamlet returns from his voyage. The two begin observing a gravemaker at his task. Hamlet is at first offended by the gravemaker's singing while he works, and he is soon startled by the gravemaker's disrespectful tossing of a skull. Hamlet's ideas about death are associated with and formed by decorum; he does not think of it as earthen graves, rotting flesh, and bare skulls. Hamlet responds to the scene in front of him by first imagining what a skull was once like: "It might be the pate of a politician, . . . Or of a courtier . . . why may not that be the skull of a lawyer?" (V.i. 86-107). As the scene continues, Hamlet speculates about the finality, the inevitability, and the commonness of death. Hamlet responds to the first qualitative problem, an impersonal level of death, by becoming engaged with the issue of death.

In this learning state, Hamlet is prompted to question the gravemaker about his trade and his task. Eventually, the man presents Hamlet with another problem. He shows

Hamlet the skull of Yorick, once King Hamlet's jester. Because he is engaged with his new realization about death, Hamlet asks to hold the skull of the man he once knew. He does not retreat from this new experience. As he reminisces about his relationship as a boy with Yorick, Hamlet is forced, by the tension of the circumstances, to move from an impersonal to a personal realization of death. He is able to articulate his learning: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio!" (V.i. 223).

Hamlet's third encounter with death is not the handling of a skull but the sight of a body being brought for burial. Hamlet hears Laertes mourn for his sister and then realizes that it is "the fair Ophelia" who is dead. As Laertes leaps into the grave, displaying his grief openly and passionately, Hamlet is moved to deal with this problem by acting. He announces his presence and proclaims his new attitude toward death and toward himself:

> What is he whose grief
> Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
> Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
> Like wonder-wounded hearers?
> This is I, Hamlet the Dane. (V.i. 277-81)

Hamlet's learning about the reality of death now becomes intensely personal; his lover is gone. With the understanding of what it means for Ophelia to be dead, Hamlet channels his passion through his intellectual understanding of his loss and <u>acts</u>: he claims his rightful position as Ophelia's

lover. He will not let Laertes take his place in this role, which is in direct contrast to his hesitancy to demand his rightful place on the throne. Hamlet finally knows, from his experience on the ship and his lesson at the graveyard, that decorum, conformity, and strictly rational thinking, all as disconnected methods, are useless when the issue is the reality of losing a loved one and facing the reality of death. Hamlet, now assured that his true feelings are appropriate, unabashedly proclaims his love: "I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum" (V.i. 292-93). With his expression of love, and by leaping into the grave after Laertes to prove his sincerity, Hamlet completes his three-level realization of death. The graveyard scene moves Hamlet to come to terms with death on impersonal, personal, and intensely personal levels. He has had to face the reality of death as the learning increases in significance; therefore, Hamlet has been prepared for the problems in the castle, which also require three levels of understanding. Hamlet is able to overcome the challenges of the graveyard because of the philosophy he formulates on the ship. Hamlet articulates this philosophy for the first time in the scene which follows the graveyard scene and precedes Hamlet's next three qualitative problems.

Hamlet's articulation takes place in his conversation with Horatio, in which Hamlet proves that his physical

display of grief for Ophelia was not "mere madness" but a manifestation of his learning. He has formed a philosophy by which to live: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii. 10-11). Because Hamlet's strongest characteristic is his intellect, he transfers what he learned on the ship into a philosophical level of understanding first. Hamlet has created and then articulated a personal philosophy that will guide him as he confronts his next three qualitative problems. Hamlet needs to come to terms with the remaining problems, not only on an intellectual level, but also on an emotional and physical level. His next set of problems tests his ability to transfer his knowledge into political action. Hamlet is also tested to see if he can adequately face and deal with the overwhelming problems that were left unresolved when he was sent to England. Hamlet must now face Laertes, whom he has wronged, and Claudius, whom he has yet to deal with properly.

The three qualitative problems that occur in the castle begin with Hamlet's being challenged to a duel with Laertes. The King has laid an impressive wager on the outcome. Hamlet's first response is to inquire about his options: "How if I answer 'no'?" (V.ii. 178). The changed Hamlet does not automatically conform to the King's request, but he uses his intellect to find out more information before he agrees. After being answered that his refusal would mean a trial, Hamlet quickly decides to act: "let the foils be brought"

(V.ii. 182). When Claudius hears the report of Hamlet's agreement, he apparently cannot believe that Hamlet is suddenly decisive because he sends a lord to check again Hamlet's answer. Hamlet's reply to the lord illustrates his determination and consistency: "I am constant to my purposes; they follow the king's pleasure: if his fitness speaks, mine is ready" (V.ii. 208-10) [my emphasis]. On an emotional level, Hamlet's feelings toward Claudius and his intuition about the duel clash with his philosophical attitude of acceptance and trust in fate. Despite Hamlet's past behavior and tendencies, however, he resolves this fourth qualitative problem by relying on his philosophy, his learning, to guide his responses:

> Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a
> special providence in the fall of a sparrow.
> If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not
> to come, it will be now; if it be not now,
> yet it will come: the readiness is all . . .
> Let be. (V.ii. 230-35)

Confronted with a challenge to his emotions, Hamlet is able to control his feelings and also to act by agreeing to the duel. Hamlet solves a problem and consequently demonstrates an ability to integrate his philosophical attitude, formed after his experience on the ship, with a challenge that affects him emotionally.

Hamlet uses words to agree to the challenge, but he then proceeds to fulfill this spoken agreement. The company enters for the duel, the two combatants meet, and Hamlet is

presented with his next qualitative problem: the presence of Laertes and Claudius. Hamlet's learning in the graveyard has shown him the grief he has caused Laertes by his murder of Polonius and his ungracious treatment of Ophelia before she died.[43] Hamlet's calm state of mind, his self-control which is a result of his philosophical and emotional learning, allows him to apologize to Laertes. Because Hamlet has come to a realization about death, he can sympathize with Laertes' grief. As Hamlet also confronts Claudius, he does not feel any compulsion to proclaim a public conviction of the King even though he has evidence to do so.[44] His faith in the natural outcome of things is a stronger force within him than any emotional judgments. Hamlet is willing to let the scene unfold, as he was not during "The Mouse-trap" because he is ready for whatever may happen. He does not feel the need to try to control the outcome by feigning madness or by letting his passionate emotions escape unchecked. He does not need to look to the dictates of decorum for an answer about how to behave in this situation; he can now look inside himself for answers. The creation of his philosophy, "Let be," is Hamlet's center, the guiding force that he has been lacking. With this center, he can face the duel, even the King's dishonesty, without concern for himself.[45]

The fencing match gets under way, and in the scuffle, Laertes and Hamlet exchange swords and then wound each other (V.ii. 312). Hamlet is then presented with his final

qualitative problem: his mother falls to the floor after having drunk accidentally from the cup poisoned by Claudius and meant for Hamlet (V.ii. 315). Hamlet's first response to his mother's falling is intellectual; he inquires about her. The King lies to Hamlet and says she faints only from the sight of blood, but the Queen herself, just before dying, tells Hamlet that the cup she drank from is poisoned. For the second time, Hamlet faces the death of a parent; his final qualitative problem is nearly identical to his characterizing problem. The drama comes full circle as Hamlet, who first faced the death of his father and was unable to respond to it with action, is now faced with the death of his mother. Hamlet's ultimate test, then, is how he will respond to his mother's information and her death.

Hamlet allows his intellect to form his first response, an inquiry: "O villainy! Ho! let the door be lock'd: / Treachery! Seek it out" (V.ii. 322-23). At the crucial moment in the play, Hamlet remains engaged with the world. Laertes falls next, poisoned from his wound by the rapier meant for Hamlet, and as he dies, he gives Hamlet clear evidence of the King's treachery: "the king, the king's to blame" (V.ii. 331). Hamlet is not threatened now by words on paper, as he was on the ship, but by the reality of death all around him.

Hamlet's typical responses to his problems have been inept or inappropriate. When Claudius acted to marry

Gertrude and take over the throne, providing Hamlet with his characterizing problem, Hamlet could not act to defy Claudius. When the Ghost gives Hamlet instructions to revenge the murder of his father, Hamlet was not able to act immediately and directly to comply. Hamlet again acts ineptly when he finds Claudius alone and when he hears Polonius behind the arras. Finally, however, when Hamlet is presented with his climactic problem on the ship, he becomes engaged, solves the problem, and acts to save his own life. He combines his intellect and intuition and formulates the philosophy, "the readiness is all." If Hamlet can stay ready, then he can respond to his ultimate qualitative problem in a way that demonstrates that he has learned a significant lesson.

When Laertes gives him undeniable evidence of the King's guilt, Hamlet is able to combine intellect with emotion and to act. He stabs Claudius and forces him to drink poison. Hamlet is able to deal with reality without being inhibited by rationality or decorum. Hamlet remains calm when he kills the King, a marked difference from the Hamlet who kills Polonius. Hamlet is not wildly passionate because his intellect has channeled his passion, allowing for both intelligent judgment and action. With "the readiness is all" as his knowledge, Hamlet has his internal code, his values. He no longer needs to rely on the dictates and patterns of the outside world to determine his behavior. Hamlet, who began with a philosophical understanding, has

passed through an emotional level of learning and finally demonstrates a physical or existential level of learning. These three levels of understanding form Hamlet's qualitative resolution. They give a unique pattern to Hamlet's imagination, guide him toward a realization of his own mortality, and allow him to die in a state of calmness and dignity.

Because Hamlet is able to apply his learning to situations of grim reality, he demonstrates that he has truly learned. The play Hamlet focuses more upon the quality of Hamlet's learning than on a sequential learning process. In Hamlet, Shakespeare implies that there is something to be learned. That crucial lesson is, "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii. 231). Shakespeare's handling of the plot shows that there is a profound climactic problem necessary to trigger learning, specifically the union of intellect and intuition, but after this climax, Hamlet is allowed a slow, gentle immersion into problems of progressively greater significance. He finally achieves useful knowledge about himself through incubation and illumination. Other characteristics of learning implied in Hamlet are the need for an openness to experience and an ability to take advantage of opportunity. One must be ready. Without this preparedness, a person cannot learn from models or experience. Shakespeare promotes the importance of significant, personal learning and illustrates the way to achieve quality learning: intellect plus

illumination. Shakespeare's emphasis on the intuition as a necessary factor in Hamlet's learning experience is similar to Joseph Heller's use of the imagination as an integral part of Yossarian's learning in Catch-22, the next work I shall examine. Catch-22 is very unlike a Renaissance play, and Yossarian is no tragic prince, but both Yossarian and Hamlet are able to transfer their learning into significant action.

Chapter 4

Yossarian: The Creative Learner

"'Oh, why didn't I listen to him?
Why wouldn't I have some faith?'" (459)

Yossarian is not a great tragic figure of the twentieth century; nevertheless, he is an important literary figure who achieves a significant level of learning. Yossarian suffers many setbacks and relapses in his learning process. His is not a smooth, continually progressive learning experience, yet it is precisely the difficulty and complexity that Yossarian finally overcomes which makes his learning truly significant and shows him to be a great learner.

Catch-22, called the best American novel in our time, has raised controversy and has prompted numerous critical studies.[46] The novel has been studied as form and is viewed, in part, as a romance-parody and a bitterly ironic piece of war fiction.[47] Critics who deal with its theme have discussed the novel's tension, its existential message, and its challenge of "justice or purpose in the universe."[48] In terms of structure, critics have debated the issue of the "true" chronology, and they have examined Heller's unifying structural devices such as "deja vu."[49] Among the many methods of analyzing Catch-22's form, theme, and structure,

one very productive and valuable technique has been overlooked, the use of Yossarian's learning experience as a way to study the novel as a whole.

Joseph Heller presents his reader with one of the most complex and entertaining characters in contemporary literature. Because Yossarian's characterization is scattered throughout the novel and because Yossarian's struggle is only one of many profound themes in this work, I find it useful to begin this study of learning by presenting three points. First, although Heller obviously did not intend for the book to be read as a chronological narrative of Yossarian's experiences, it is necessary for this study of learning to determine and then follow the events in chronological order. Therefore, I am indebted to Doug Gaukroger for his in-depth study of the chronology of events in Catch-22.[50] Second, it is also advantageous to consider Heller's work as a "psycho-drama."[51] In other words, several characters, who will be discussed in more detail in a later section, represent many of Yossarian's internal abilities, qualities, and/or values. It is my position that Yossarian has four distinct qualities within him--intellect, conscience, faith, and imagination--but these generally surface only one or two at a time. It takes a significant, qualitative problem for these traits all to reveal themselves at once and for them to work in harmony with one another. Finally, as critics have noted, one of the dominant themes of Catch-22 is the

complexity and absurdity of institutions, organizations, and the world.[52] This absurdity is one of Yossarian's major obstacles in learning. As Yossarian encounters his various problems and traumatic experiences, he repeatedly comes up against what I refer to as "the system." The system, what 1960's slang labeled "the establishment," includes the bureaucratic, absurd structure of institutions such as the military, the worthlessness and inadequacy of authority figures, and the meaningless values and mores of contemporary society.

With the use of concepts such as Yossarian's chronological experiences, the novel as psycho-drama, and the theme of the absurd system, I shall analyze the characterization of Yossarian, the problems which complicate his character, the problems which bring his learning to a climax, and the problem which offers Yossarian the opportunity to apply his learning. This analysis will reveal that in the end, Yossarian is not only capable of creating a solution to his qualitative problem, but he also creates meaning for himself.

CHARACTERIZATION

In the chronological sequence of his experiences, Yossarian reveals that he admires desertion, wishes to evade responsibility, yet stays within the bounds of "the system," and also that he is spiritually cynical. When he is a

private at Lowery Field, Colorado, sixty-four men vanish one payday.[53] Yossarian, who assumes the men went AWOL by unanimous decision, is so impressed by this apparent desertion that he excitedly tells ex-P. F. C. Wintergreen about their daring success (108). Yossarian's elation over the Grand Conspiracy of Lowery Field shows that he is a great admirer of those who desert, and his desire to find a way to escape responsibility safely is encouraged by the men's disappearance. Yossarian's method of desertion, however, is to enter the hospital, which he does for the first time while at Lowery Field. He skips calisthenics one day and reports to the dispensary with a fake pain in his right side (181). An English intern kindly introduces Yossarian to a technique for dodging the system by telling him that if he hopes to have weeks of reprieve in the hospital, he should use a liver complaint (181). The intern provides a model that Yossarian eagerly follows, and, like the men who disappear, he also encourages Yossarian's desire to evade responsibility. During this same hospital stay, Yossarian models himself after the soldier who saw everything twice and fakes those symptoms to prolong his stay (185). Yossarian is characterized, at this point in the chronology, as one who relies on the opinions of others to make his decisions, one who admires rebelliousness but will not rebel totally himself, and one who tries to avoid as much responsibility as possible. These three initial characteristics culminate in the final experience of Yossarian's first hospital stay.

Once Yossarian is "cured" from his disease of seeing everything twice, a doctor immediately offers Yossarian "a proposition" (187). For the first time in his experiences, Yossarian is confronted with a situation that leaves him two choices: he can pretend to be Guiseppe, the dying soldier, or he can let the doctor report him for lying about his liver symptoms (187). Yossarian can either go along with the doctor's plan, which will not require much thinking or creativity on Yossarian's part, or he can reject the plan, which would force him to create or find another solution to the demands of military life. Yossarian's response, which is to agree to play the part of the dying soldier, summarizes his characterization to this point. He compromises his intellect by allowing the doctor to manipulate him and his imagination by participating in the phony "business of illusion" (188). Instead of creating an alternative, Yossarian allows himself to be "used." The intellectual decisions that Yossarian makes to escape his obligations, such as the decisions to fake a pain, to follow the intern's advice, and to pretend that he is dying, are all decisions patterned after the actions and advice of others. Yossarian simply cannot use his imagination to create his own personal solution to a problem. When presented with a problem, particularly a two-sided deal, Yossarian merely considers the options presented to him by others and chooses the one that is "safest" for him without attempting to provide his own

answers and without thinking of anyone else. Because Yossarian agrees to play Guiseppe, he is able to keep his option of escaping frequently into the hospital, while he also avoids open rebellion.

Yossarian's next decision, to leave Lowery Field and to volunteer for cadet training in Santa Ana, California, further illustrates his character. Yossarian volunteers for cadet training because he knows the process is long, and he reasons that the war will be over before he is ready for combat (74). Entering aviation cadet training is Yossarian's way of deserting within the system, similar to his running into the hospital. He thinks that being in cadet training will keep him out of combat and also keep him from being labeled a deserter. This seemingly rational decision to enter cadet training is another example of how Yossarian uses his intellect, but his resolution fails in part because it is so conventional and unimaginative.

While in Santa Ana for cadet training, Yossarian spends an "illogical" Thanksgiving in a hotel room with Lieutenant Schiesskopf's wife (183-85). This scene in the novel characterizes Yossarian as spiritually cynical. When the Lieutenant's wife presents Yossarian with the idea that the world is basically good and that they have things to be thankful for, Yossarian's cynicism is clearly revealed in his response: "I'll bet I can name two things to be miserable about for every one you can name to be thankful for"

(184). Yossarian goes on to claim that God's creations are failures. Yossarian is cynical because he sees himself as one of God's failures, and he cannot yet use his imagination to create values. Yossarian's cynicism contributes to his learning difficulties, then, because his rejection of traditional religious values undermines his faith in himself.

Yossarian's experiences at Lowery Field and Santa Ana characterize him before he even gets into combat. His dominant characteristic at this point is a "prostituted" imagination; he allows himself to be led, used, and manipulated. He admires the idea of deserting the service, but his conscience is so bound by the system that he cannot make any bold moves. The extent of his imaginative responses is to enter the hospital or to enter cadet training. Yossarian has the intellect but not the imagination necessary for creating a productive scheme to solve a problem. As a result, he uses his imagination for avoidance and cynicism rather than for solutions and faith.

Before Yossarian is presented with a significant characterizing problem it is already clear what he needs to create and/or strengthen within himself before he can begin learning. He needs to gain faith in himself, to listen to his own conscience, to sharpen his intellect, and he needs to develop an imagination, one that will guide him toward creative solutions to his problems. Heller creates four foils either to illustrate the values that Yossarian needs to

build within himself or to establish the obstacles that Yossarian needs to overcome before true learning can begin. For example, the chaplain represents an attitude that Yossarian needs to strengthen. The chaplain symbolizes spiritual values to Yossarian and reminds him of his lack of faith, his cynicism. When he first sees the tiny cross on the chaplain's collar (13), Yossarian falls in love; he falls in love with a value he admires but knows he does not have. He admires what the chaplain represents just as he admires the sixty-four men who he assumes have deserted. The chaplain is a foil who, with all his crises of faith, illustrates that Yossarian needs a strong faith in himself, not in an absurd, complicated system.

Nately's whore is a symbol of the conscience, the undeveloped conscience that first exists in Yossarian only as guilt for past actions. It is Nately's whore who spurs Yossarian into action, and it is she, as the mature conscience, who stabs him when he makes a grave error in judgment. Nately's whore illustrates Yossarian's need to listen to his conscience and use it for proper action. Related to the symbol of Nately's whore as the conscience is the old man in the whorehouse who symbolizes cynicism and demonstrates what fault Yossarian needs to confront before he can learn. The qualities that Nately's whore and the cynical old man represent are interrelated because Yossarian must learn to use his conscience to confront and control his cynicism, and

only with the integration of conscience and cynicism can he strengthen his final necessary quality: the imagination, represented by Orr.

Orr has a strong imagination, illustrated by his ability to focus all of his energy on a long-range plan while also inventing tactics to divert attention. The novel makes it clear that if Yossarian can learn from Orr, he will gain a valuable lesson applicable to any problem. Orr's imaginative strength, his ability to use the imagination to take charge of his own destiny, illuminates Yossarian's weak imagination and his need to learn that he can be like Orr. The four foils, whose characterizations are dispersed throughout the novel, serve to illustrate how Yossarian needs to learn. He must develop his imagination, create a faith, confront his cynicism, and deepen his conscience before he can tackle what he needs to learn, how to create a valid alternative to the system.

CHARACTERIZING PROBLEMS

The battles of Ferrara and Bologna effectively summarize Yossarian's characterization because they are problems that demonstrate his typical responses. When confronted with the reality of battle, Yossarian's cynical use of his intellect dominates. He cannot use the imagination productively, and he learns nothing from these experiences except

that his past methods of acting within the system seem to be his only option. As such, Ferrara and Bologna constitute Yossarian's pre-test in his learning process.

The problem Ferrara presents is that the bridge has not been bombed after six days and nine missions (141). Yossarian, knowing the system well, is cynically sure that if the bridge is not destroyed on the seventh day, the group will have to go back. On the tenth mission, Yossarian's crew misses the target. His response is to lead his flight of six planes over the target a second time (141). Yossarian was not really "brave then" (141); he just did not want to endure the dread of yet another dangerous mission. Yossarian depends on the literalness of his superiors' instructions ("Destroy the bridge") to justify losing Kraft and his crew when they go around the second time. Yossarian's lack of a conscience is apparent when he does not know how he should feel about the death of Kraft and the others (141). Finally, Yossarian suggests that they give him a medal for going around twice (142). This response to his suspicion that he may have been wrong illustrates how Yossarian uses his intellect to overpower his guilt. Because he believes in the system, he cynically engages in its hypocrisy.

Yossarian's second characterizing problem is Bologna, including the threat of this dangerous mission, the first milk run, and the second disastrous run. Yossarian's dominant characteristic throughout the entire Bologna episode is

his intense desire to escape responsibility coupled with his inability to create useful, imaginative solutions. As the rumor of the horror of Bologna spreads, Yossarian's first response is to swear that he is not going (114). When his declaration does not alter anything, Yossarian tries action: he moves the bomb line--after Clevinger inadvertently gives him the idea--(123); he puts soap in the sweet potatoes (128); and he invents the story of the Lepage glue gun (128). These three attempts to avoid the inevitable seem rather clever, but Yossarian either uses the suggestions of others or imagines such temporary solutions that no overall resolution is possible. The men soon get well after eating the poisoned sweet potatoes, and even the rumor of a powerful glue gun cannot stop the system from moving ahead.

As the first run to Bologna gets under way, Yossarian immediately compromises himself by going when he swore he would not. Once he is up in the plane, though, Yossarian responds in desperation and yanks out the intercom wires (145). This solution too, is only temporary, and one that the system will not tolerate. Yossarian's plane goes back to the base, and when the other planes return unharmed, Yossarian cynically assumes that clouds covered the target and the mission is still to be flown (148). Actually the mission, a "milk run," was successfully accomplished, but there is still another to be flown--with Yossarian assigned to the post of lead bombardier as "punishment" for sabotaging

his plane in his haphazard attempt to avoid going (149). On this flight, Yossarian is confident of another milk run; thus he takes no evasive action. His expectations are shattered, however, as heavy flak appears suddenly from every direction (150). When Aarfy, a character of brute insensitivity, blocks Yossarian's one opening to safety, Yossarian responds by feeling humiliated and impotent. His "spirit died," and he was "ready to weep in self-pity" (153). Yossarian's impotence dictates his response to the after-shock of Bologna: he escapes to Rome (156).

Yossarian's typically inadequate responses to Ferrara and Bologna clearly establish him as an impotent character. He cynically depends on external structures--the system, the advice of others--to make decisions and take action. He compromises his internal abilities and qualities--intellect, conscience, and faith--by not using them to free the powers of his imagination.

Yossarian, a bombardier, is trapped inside his limited solutions just as he is trapped inside the glass bubble of a B-25 bomber. There, hanging below the nose of the plane, he has the best vantage point to see the danger he is in, and consequently he is the most exposed member of the crew, both physically and emotionally. Initially, when he is frightened by the possibility of combat, Yossarian's solution is to escape to cadet training. Similarly, when he is confronted by enemy flak, he wants to escape from the bubble to the

interior of the plane. In both instances, he wants to escape to a safe place within the system. Neither cadet training nor the plane are safe, however, and his solutions are not helpful to him. Yossarian needs an imaginative solution.

In the chronological order of the novel, Yossarian still has encountered only abstract problems; the realities of death and pain have not touched Yossarian directly. His character is ready, however, to be complicated. He must encounter concrete problems, and his responses to them will demonstrate precisely what Yossarian needs to learn.

COMPLICATING PROBLEMS

Yossarian has a rather lengthy series of complicating problems to confront, but the major ones are the battle of Avignon, the continual raising of the number of required missions, the battle of Parma, and the actions of Orr. All of these problems are unexpected, traumatic, and so forceful that they change Yossarian. He becomes increasingly aware that his habitual responses do not solve his problems.

Avignon complicates Yossarian's environment and his typical responses because, for the first time, he is confronted directly with death. Snowden dies in front of Yossarian (52, 170, 230). Full of compassion for Snowden, Yossarian tenderly and meticulously binds his leg wound.

Yossarian's treatment, however, is typically ineffectual because he addresses the wrong problem. Finally he locates Snowden's most severe wound and then watches as Snowden's guts spill out (450). All Yossarian can do is to repeat, "There, there" (450). Yossarian is trapped in the plane and must confront the "garbage" of man, just as he is trapped by the system and must confront his own ineffectiveness. Yossarian's response to this traumatic experience is twofold. On one hand, the compassion he shows for Snowden demonstrates the surfacing of Yossarian's conscience. When he confronts another's pain, Yossarian's conscience begins to grow. Paradoxically however, as Yossarian's conscience surfaces, his spiritual cynicism is also intensified. He reaffirms his belief, while staring at Snowden's guts and hearing his cry of "I'm cold," that God is no good because He created pain and death; thus Yossarian sees the world as harsh and cruel just as he begins to feel responsible.

Although Yossarian does not come to terms with Snowden's death until near the end of the novel (445-50), he begins to suffer guilt from his ineffectiveness after Avignon, and he makes two attempts to cleanse himself of this guilt. Yossarian's desire for cleansing illustrates that with the surfacing of his conscience and the accompanying belief that the world is evil, he tries to become moral, to overcome evil with his conscience. For example, Yossarian decides not to wear a uniform any more (268) and goes naked. He

feels that the world has contaminated him, has soaked his uniform with blood, and therefore he wants to be pure. Yossarian also attends Snowden's funeral and sits in the tree he calls "the tree of life . . . and of knowledge of good and evil, too" (269). Yossarian is looking for spiritual strength to reinforce his decision to overcome the cynicism of the world and to become moral. As he sits in the tree though, it is Milo who comes to him, who is not a source of morality and righteousness. When Milo offers "fruit" (chocolate-covered cotton) and asks Yossarian to approve his attempt to pass it off as cotton candy, Yossarian rejects the idea and does not succumb to the "temptation" of lying to the men. Thus, there is hope for Yossarian that he will develop spiritual strength and a fully defined conscience, but his attempts to come to terms with the after-shock of Avignon are haphazard and ineffectual. Yossarian does not yet understand that he cannot cleanse himself of the guilt of Avignon until he can accept responsibility for his actions.

Because the number of missions is raised to forty-five (169), the world remains cruel. When Yossarian's attempts to be pure and moral are contradicted by this additional evil, he relapses into his typical responses and runs into the hospital. The next two times the number of missions is raised, Yossarian responds by going for help to members of the system. He goes to Doc Daneeka for help getting a

discharge when they are raised to fifty (22) and to Major Major at fifty-five missions (104). When Major Major offers Yossarian only milk runs, he turns the chance down (106), illustrating the progressive development of his conscience, but Yossarian's repeated reliance on members of an ineffective system to solve his problems demonstrates that he needs to learn the necessity of doing things for himself.

The mission to Parma complicates Yossarian's trust in others for guidance and demonstrates that he needs to learn to be his own "navigator." Because Aarfy, the navigator, gets the crew lost and caught in unexpected flak, Yossarian is wounded in the thigh (297). This problem is even more concrete for Yossarian than Avignon; it is his pain, not Snowden's. Yossarian's first response is a cynical one because he expects the worst and thinks he has been castrated. His cynicism follows him to the hospital, where he is told that he is no different than "a gear or a bedpan" (300). He accepts the system's judgment and begins to act like a machine, cruelly attacking Nurse Duckett (301-02). When Yossarian does not get discharged from the service by mistake (312), he is incensed, but he goes for help to Doc Daneeka, whose cynicism and doubt make him exactly the wrong person to provide help or comfort. Yossarian's predicament in being so close to a discharge and then losing it because of the inadequacy of the system causes him, instead of acting, to ask, "Why me?" With the development of his

conscience after Avignon, Yossarian thinks the system should have a conscience too. What he learns from his Parma experience, however, is a cynical lesson, that he is still trapped and that no one will help any one else.

In his conversation with Orr which follows his wound at Parma and his hospital stay (319-25), Yossarian encounters his next complicating problem. Yossarian's traits of not using his imagination and not having any faith are prominent in this scene. Although Yossarian displays pity and compassion for Orr (321), indicating that his conscience is still active, he cannot learn from Orr. Orr makes several attempts to teach Yossarian how to use his imagination and make it work consistently, but Yossarian's overpowering despair will allow him to interpret Orr's lesson only literally, not imaginatively. Orr gives Yossarian several clues that he has a plan: "[Orr] took hold of something invisible . . . and held it up for Yossarian to see" (324). Because Orr only implies his message, Yossarian cannot understand: "Are you trying to tell me something?" (325). Yossarian thinks of Orr only as a "happy imbecile" (319); thus he cannot bring himself to trust Orr. When Orr asks Yossarian outright, "Why don't you ever fly with me?" (324), Yossarian can only respond with shame and embarrassment. Because Yossarian suffered a "spiritual wound" at Parma when he realized that the world is still evil, he cannot have faith, even in Orr, the person who "never lied to him about anything crucial" (47).

Yossarian, after his complicating problems, is left with a conscience but no faith, a knowledge of pain and death but no imaginative way to deal with it. Instead of learning from Orr, he wallows in self-pity and asks, "Why me?" What Yossarian needs to learn is now firm. If he can develop his imagination, enrich a personal faith, he can learn that even though the world is evil he can be good. He can learn that he is not trapped by the system, that he is not impotent, that there is an alternative, and that he can do for himself what needs to be done.

CLIMACTIC PROBLEMS

Yossarian's climactic problems, those that test him with dramatic force, begin when the group goes to bomb La Spezia, and Nately and Dobbs are killed (385). They continue when Yossarian receives news of the destruction of the whorehouse and when he has to face the meaning of Catch-22. Yossarian's other climactic problems are his walk through "The Eternal City," his offer of the "deal," his confrontation with the mysterious man, and his news about Orr.

Yossarian responds to Nately's death, which can be viewed symbolically as the death of innocence, by refusing to fly more missions (400). Although Yossarian takes this positive step towards making a decision regarding his own fate, his actions are "negative" responses, typically hap-

hazard and ineffective. Yossarian marches backward with a gun on his hip, "continuously spinning around as he walked to make sure no one was sneaking up on him from behind" (400-01). Thus, with Nately's death and the raising of the number of missions to eighty, Yossarian still does not prove himself capable of imaginative, viable solutions.

When Captain Black maliciously informs Yossarian that the whore house in Rome has been "busted up" and that the whores have all been "[f]lushed right out into the street" (413), he provides Yossarian with his next climactic problem. For the first time in the novel, Yossarian makes a decision that is not compromised by his desire to work within the system. He responds immediately and goes AWOL to Rome with Milo, determined to try to help the whores (413). Yossarian is able to make a firm decision and then follow it through with action because his conscience is strong enough that it can inform his intellect. His intellect and his conscience work together on the problem.

While on the way to Rome, the growth and strength of Yossarian's conscience is clear as he mulls over his entire experience in the war:

> Nately's whore was on his mind, as were Kraft and Orr and Nately and Dunbar, and Kid Sampson and McWatt, and all the poor and stupid and diseased people he had seen in Italy, Egypt, and North Africa and knew about in other areas of the world, and Snowden and Nately's whore's kid sister were on his conscience, too. (414)

Yossarian also begins to understand why the whore holds him responsible for Nately's death: he is a member of the human race and part of the system. Yossarian comes to the realization that "[s]omeone had to do something sometime" (414); thus he begins to learn. His learning is triggered by his conscience and his intellect working simultaneously. He adopts the whores as his "cause," and because it is a decision uniquely his own, not one forced upon him by a member of the system, Yossarian can act positively.

The act of making and then following through on a meaningful decision allows Yossarian to take another positive step in his climactic problems. For the first time in the novel, his imagination surfaces and works for him in solving a problem. When the old woman tells Yossarian that the soldiers' destruction of the whore house was based in the right of Catch-22 (416), Yossarian sees beyond the literalness of this law and understands on one level that "Catch-22 did not exist, he was positive of that" (418). He is finally able to use his imagination to overcome the barrier of Catch-22, which is a turning point in Yossarian's learning. Yossarian's next insight is mainly an intellectual one as he comes to a further understanding of Catch-22: "What did matter was that everyone thought it existed, and that was much worse" (418).

Yossarian does make progress with his decision to help Nately's whore's kid sister, but he still is not capable of

focusing his conscience, intellect, faith, and imagination all on the same problem at the same time. His conscience and intellect have functioned together, and his imagination has surfaced briefly, but he still has not established faith in himself. Because of this lack of faith, Yossarian is not prepared to act without any external guides. Therefore, he turns to Milo for help in locating the kid sister (418). Yossarian still believes that the system, which Milo cynically represents, can help. His intellect, conscience, and imagination are definitely stronger factors than ever before, but unfortunately, Yossarian still has faith in the absurd system.

When Milo deserts him to search for illegal tobacco (420), Yossarian is completely dependent upon himself for guidance, and his experience in Rome proves to be a climactic problem too overwhelming for him at this point in his learning. Yossarian starts through the city of Rome, alone in the night, and he heads immediately for the officers' apartment. Without a guide, Yossarian is unsure of himself and thus wants to get back to the security that the traditional system has always provided him. During his horrifying walk, which is symbolically his descent into hell (54), Yossarian's conscience grows, a positive factor in his learning experience, but he does not know how to deal with his pangs of conscience; they are so painful that he wants to react violently:

> Yossarian was moved by such intense pity for [the] poverty [of a small boy] that he wanted to smash his pale, sad, sickly face with his fist and knock him out of existence because he brought to mind <u>all</u> the pale, sad, sickly children in Italy. . . . (421)

Yossarian's violent feelings occur because his cynicism grows along with his conscience just as when Snowden was wounded. He is faced with the reality of a corrupt world, and even though he can feel pity, the situation is too confusing and too horrifying for him to be able to develop his learning abilities further.

Yossarian undergoes a dual change or a two-sided experience as he walks through Rome. As he encounters beatings and loneliness, part of his consciousness descends into cynical mistrust, and "[h]is spirit [becomes] sick" (426). At the same time, however, a part of him ascends into an awareness that he is not estranged from the horror, but that he is responsible for doing something about all the pain and injustice.[55] Awareness and responsibility are two separate things, and despite Yossarian's awareness of what should be done, he has not learned yet to <u>accept</u> his realizations, which is evident by his reaction when he completes his journey through Rome at night and reaches the officers' apartment. Yossarian's need to rely on the external guidance of the system is obvious when he finds the dead servant girl on the sidewalk, discovers that Aarfy did it, and responds automatically with the assumption that the police will take care of

it, that justice will be done. Yossarian's intellectual reliance on the system to solve problems finally becomes a shattered ideal when the police come, ignore Aarfy, and arrest Yossarian for being in Rome without a pass (429).

Because of Yossarian's traumatic experience of Parma, the absurd visits to the hospital, and his various unsuccessful attempts to get discharged, he ought to have learned that the system is ineffectual. Yet it is a solution that Yossarian clings to because he does not have the ability to combine repeatedly his four qualities to solve problems. When left alone in the horror of Rome, Yossarian trusts again in the absurd system because he lacks the right combination of his internal faculties--intellect, faith, conscience, and imagination.

After his arrest in Rome, Yossarian suffers a complete relapse from all the progress he has made in using his intellect, imagination, and his conscience. With his cynicism reinforced, he concludes that the world is absolutely corrupt, that faith in anything is useless, and that only cynicism and complaisance are appropriate responses. While in this deeply negative state, Yossarian is offered a deal by Korn and Cathcart (436), his major climactic problem. Yossarian once again has two choices. Going along with their "odious" plan would require no concentrated effort or creative thinking on Yossarian's part. If he rejects their plan, he will still have the same problem, and he will have to create his own solution.

Yossarian realizes that it would be a "scummy trick" to play on the men in the squadron if he pretends to be the pal of the Colonels and is sent home a hero, but he ignores his conscience and accepts the deal (437-38). Because he has experienced evil in the world, he becomes evil too. He makes an intellectual choice that negates all value.

Directly after he accepts the deal and agrees to lie to his friends, Yossarian's conscience, in the form of Nately's whore, literally stabs him (439). He enters the hospital because of his stab wound and is put under anesthesia (441). In this state, he is removed from his absurd, chaotic surroundings and enters a calm, serene world of unconsciousness. This daze is interrupted only briefly by the appearance of "a strange man with a mean face who curled his lip at him in a spiteful scowl and bragged, 'We've got your pal, buddy. We've got your pal'" (442). Yossarian's confrontation with the mysterious man is his next climactic problem. The man, like Nately's whore, represents his conscience because he reminds Yossarian of all his dead or "disappeared" pals. In addition, he also, like the old man in the whore house, represents cynicism, and the mix of the two conflicting traits in one figure causes Yossarian to become engaged with the problem of the man's mysterious message. On an intellectual level, Yossarian realizes that "they" (the system) have got all his pals (444). Yossarian is able to use foresight and realizes that the system may "disappear" him too

if he does not begin to have faith in something other than the absurd system and act in his own interest. The man's strange message also prompts Yossarian to use hindsight to examine his acceptance of the deal and re-evaluate whether his choice was the right one. With this awareness of past and future, Yossarian chooses again and, in front of the chaplain, reverses his initial decision to go along with the deal (444). The man reminds Yossarian that his actions also affect others, and Yossarian is able to stay engaged. He decides that positive action is necessary, but he still does not know what to do (444).

Yossarian thinks that he has solved the problem of the mysterious man by listening to his social conscience and changing his decision. However, the mysterious man appears again and repeats, "We've got your pal, buddy" (445). The man is demanding something more of him, but Yossarian does not know what he is trying to communicate: "Yossarian was unnerved. 'What the hell are you talking about?' he pleaded in incipient panic. . . . He wondered who his pal was" (445). As he wonders, Yossarian thinks of Snowden, and in the peace of the hospital night, he concentrates for the first time on his vivid images of Snowden's death. Because he is still engaged, Yossarian sees his cynicism mirrored in Snowden's guts, and he begins to understand how he has allowed the world's evil to overwhelm and inhibit him. With this realization, he turns his guilt feelings of the past into an

active, useful conscience for the present and future. Yossarian is finally able to articulate "Snowden's secret": "The spirit gone, man is garbage" (450); thus Yossarian can stop treating his own wrong wound. He can stop trying to "beat" his cynicism with his conscience. He can now accept the fact of evil without being compromised by it.

Yossarian's ability to engage with the problems of the mysterious messenger and also the haunting memory of Snowden's death leads him to understand that even though the world is evil, he can be good. His conscience can match his cynicism, and he can now face and effectively solve the problems of the present, instead of dwelling on the guilt of the past. Coming to terms with Snowden's death is Yossarian's acceptance of his obligation. He fuses the split between awareness and responsibility; thus he accepts the fact that he responded ineffectively to Snowden's wound and to his death. With this new acceptance, Yossarian has his intellect and conscience prepared for significant learning. Yossarian finally knows that he cannot escape his responsibility by hiding within the system. He knows the system does not provide moral answers and he knows he needs a moral answer.

Yossarian proclaims his decision to reject the Colonels' deal to Major Danby, who as the rational university professor helps Yossarian intellectually to analyze his situation and his options. In the scene with Danby, Yossarian's conscience

is one evident trait; he thinks of the other men in the group when explaining his rebellious decision. He asks Danby, "Is [the deal] best for the men in the group who will have to keep flying more missions?" (452). Yossarian also senses the predicament he is in and the power of the system:

> What does upset me, though, is that they think I'm a sucker. They think that they're smart, and that the rest of us are dumb. And, you know, Danby, the thought occurs to me right now, for the first time, that maybe they're right. (455)

Yossarian realizes, with help from Danby, that the system can do whatever it wants to with him. Finally, Yossarian and Danby conclude that there is "No hope" (458). Because Yossarian relies first only on his intellect and conscience as he tries to decide on a course of positive action, he works himself into a hopeless state of selfish concern. To help him create meaning for himself, he obviously needs more than just the intellect and the conscience. Yossarian still needs the power of the imagination, which will allow him to create an alternative to the system, to have faith in it (and in himself), and to act on it.

At the moment when Yossarian and Danby decide that there is no hope, the chaplain enters and presents Yossarian's final climactic problem. The chaplain relates "electrifying news about Orr": "A miracle! . . . Washed ashore in Sweden after so many weeks at sea" (458). This sudden news about Orr is just the impetus that Yossarian's

learning experience has been lacking. He needed hope, and Orr, with his imaginative desertion, supplies Yossarian with hope, which is, essentially, having faith in imagination. Yossarian, who hit bottom with his dismissal of hope, just as he hit bottom in Rome, rapidly ascends to a new understanding. Because he has his intellect and conscience engaged, and because he has integrated his awareness of evil into his conscience, Yossarian is ready to listen to Orr, to the imagination. He now understands the complete truth about Orr--that he planned everything from his crab apple cheeks to his valve tinkering, that he spoke in metaphor intentionally, and that he acted because he believed in himself. Yossarian quickly teaches the chaplain and Danby the truth: "Washed ashore, hell! . . . He rowed there! . . . He planned it that way!" (458). Because his imagination is now engaged, Yossarian is able to compare himself with Orr and learn exactly what he has been lacking: "Danby, you dope! There is hope after all. . . . Oh, why didn't I listen to him? Why wouldn't I have some faith?" (459). Yossarian is not slowed this time by guilt, but he puts his conscience directly to work, along with his intellect, his faith, and his imagination, to create a positive resolution.

QUALITATIVE PROBLEM

Yossarian has successfully solved his climactic problems and has integrated all four qualities necessary for

learning. However, Yossarian is now back to where he began his experiences: he still has the problem of the war. He is still in the military, and his life is still endangered. Once again, Yossarian confronts a two-sided problem. He was given two choices about pretending to be Guiseppe, the dying soldier, and he was also given two choices by Korn and Cathcart when they offered him the deal. Yossarian eventually made a significant decision to reject the deal, but now he faces his qualitative problem, his "post-test" to see if he can apply his learning to a meaningful, creative choice. He can either waste all that he has learned, compromise himself, and return to fly more missions, or he can do what he is initially characterized as admiring: he can desert.

Yossarian's newly-strengthened imagination synthesizes his intellect, conscience, and faith into understanding, true learning, and allows him to form a qualitative resolution: "I'm going to run away" (460). Yossarian's intellect brings to mind all the past experiences in which Orr tried to teach him, and he understands what Orr was trying to do for him. His conscience, which is working strongly within him, allows him to think of someone other than himself; thus he decides to take Nately's whore's kid sister with him to Sweden. On an even higher level of understanding, Yossarian also accepts his conscience: "God bless [my conscience] . . . I wouldn't want to live without strong misgivings" (462). Finally, Yossarian's faith in himself makes him sure that

his decision is a right one: "I'm not running away from my responsibilities. I'm running to them. There's nothing negative about running away to save my life" (461). Yossarian has a new sense of self-worth and knows that his life is all the meaning he needs.

In addition to Yossarian's ability to act selflessly and purposefully, his qualitative resolution also demonstrates his ability to overcome his illusory views of reality. Yossarian first viewed the system, and therefore the world, as totally meaningless and absurd. However, after Avignon, he acquired a combination of guilt and cynicism; this union resulted in his attempt to try to overcome his cynicism with his conscience. Because he tried to be pure and moral, Yossarian viewed the system as moral, also. When this second view was shattered by a number of traumatic experiences--the missions being raised, the battle of Parma, and the Roman police--Yossarian was lost because he once again equated "self" with a fallen "world." However, with the development of his imagination, he comes to an understanding that it is not the world that matters, but it is the individual who is most important.

Yossarian forms a qualitative resolution and thus achieves a significant level of learning. He demonstrates to Danby that he has learned that the world is evil but that his goodness is important: "Let the bastards thrive, for all I care, since I can't do anything to stop them. . . .

I've got to get to Sweden" (462). Yossarian succeeds because he creates his own meaning and because he overcomes the obstacles of the complex system, obstacles such as the ambiguity and cold rationality of Catch-22. In effect, Yossarian creates a way to deal with any problem that his absurd world may confront him with. The fact that Yossarian runs away has been viewed as both "an existential act of individual affirmation" and as "an egocentric denial of social responsibility."[56] In the terms of his learning, the former view is more accurate because Yossarian is able to accept responsibility. He learns that a person is responsible for himself, is capable of action, and is not dependent on any external structures.

Heller's concepts about learning in Catch-22 center on the idea that a person must ultimately be his own navigator; he must learn what he can create. Learning is an individual act, and prophets cannot teach the truth but can only encourage self-motivated learning and then provide reinforcement once individual learning has taken place. Orr, as a stimulant and guide for Yossarian's imagination, is certainly a prophet, but Yossarian cannot learn from him during their conversation because his four essential qualities are not all engaged. Another characteristic of Heller's view of learning is that the process towards a meaningful level of understanding is long and complex, with many highs and lows, and an individual's learning problems will never be resolved

if he does not develop, strengthen, and then apply all four essential qualities--intellect, conscience, faith, and imagination.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Oedipus, Hamlet, and Yossarian are important literary figures from the Classical, Renaissance, and Contemporary periods, respectively. What is important for this study, however, is that each character is a successful learner. Also important is that these three great works of literature --Oedipus, Hamlet, and Catch-22--have principles in common which can teach us about learning: first, two kinds of truth exist, concrete and abstract; second, each person's learning processes and patterns differ; third, a learner can benefit from a prophet figure; and finally, obstacles in learning must be overcome before significant progress can begin.

The dominant, abstract truth in Oedipus is that absolute truth does exist; thus Oedipus faces the abstract problem of defining what absolute truth is, what it means, and how powerful it is. He must find out for himself whether or not the gods control human fate. On a concrete level, Oedipus' problem is to confirm evidence, to find facts that either support or discount what Teiresias told him about himself. As Oedipus begins with the question of "Who killed Laius?" and moves to the problem of "Who am I?" he must come to learn internally what he knows only intellectually. Oedipus'

problem is initially a problem of the entire kingdom, but it gradually becomes his own. The end result, however, affects not only Oedipus, but also everyone whose life he touches.

"Truth" in Hamlet, as in Oedipus, is absolute; there is "providence" in Hamlet, but there is also the need for each individual to come to terms with providence by forming his own personal philosophy. Hamlet's abstract problem, then, is to form a personal philosophy and then put it to use emotionally and physically by learning to rely on a personal code of action, to overcome his need for external guides. Hamlet, like Oedipus, confronts the concrete problem of wanting to confirm evidence told to him, but Hamlet's problem requires consequential action; he must revenge his father's murder before his problem will be solved. Also unlike Oedipus, Hamlet's problem affects him alone because no one else knows what the Ghost told him.

In contrast to Oedipus and Hamlet, Yossarian cannot come to terms with absolute truth because there is none. The only truth in the world of Catch-22 is that which the individual creates for himself. On the level of abstract problems, therefore, Yossarian must create meaning, an alternative to Catch-22, which will guide him toward creative solutions to any important problem. Yossarian's concrete problem is his desire to evade the war, yet until he creates meaning for himself he is trapped by the system, and he cannot bring himself to desert or break any "laws." Like Hamlet,

Yossarian needs to act to solve his concrete problem; Hamlet must kill Claudius, and Yossarian must deny the system completely. Yossarian's problem affects him profoundly, and he responds by trying to pass it on to members of the system, such as Doc Daneeka, Major Major, and ex-P. F. C. Wintergreen.

As these three characters attempt to solve their concrete and abstract problems, they go through different, yet specific learning processes. Because each character deals with a different kind of truth, each has a unique overall pattern to his learning. Oedipus' learning pattern is that he reasons his way to absolute truth; Hamlet's pattern is that he intuits absolute truth and then must immerse himself in it; and Yossarian's pattern is that he must create his own truth.

Oedipus' learning process begins after he has been told the truth. He then proceeds step-by-step to try to confirm what he is told. Oedipus is portrayed, with one exception, as one eager to learn anything which will help his people. He hesitates to grow only when he is afraid to learn what may hurt him. Oedipus also fails to take advantage of several learning opportunities because his deficiencies, his pride and self-concern, interfere. Because of his fear and his deficiencies, Oedipus' generally smooth inductive pattern is interrupted when he comes dangerously close to learning something that will destroy his authority or his self-image.

Hamlet is also presented early in the play with the truth, but unlike Oedipus, Hamlet makes little inductive progress toward confirming and accepting that truth; rather he intuits his learning in a moment. Before he comes to his illuminating experience, Hamlet is a reluctant learner. He plods along without making any significant advances. He too fails to learn from his complicating problems. Finally, he is forced, by the circumstances of his environment, to immerse himself in his learning and in reality. When his life is threatened, Hamlet's success in learning then begins.

In contrast to Oedipus, who makes fairly steady progress, and to Hamlet, who essentially learns all at once, Yossarian is an unsteady or vacillating learner who struggles to create meaning. He has highs and lows, repeatedly making progress and then falling back. Yossarian, like the others, fails to learn from certain opportunities and also has one specific experience which engages him completely with his learning. From that point, he ceases to fluctuate and makes direct progress toward meaningful learning.

The prophet in all three works tries to teach the main character by telling him the truth outright and encouraging him to come to terms with it, by offering him clues, hints, and guides by which the character may reach the truth himself, or by using a combination of both. Whatever technique

is presented, all three prophets cause the characters to begin learning because the prophets present the characters with truths that demand their attention.

Oedipus sends for Teiresias, a prophet, for help in finding the murderer of Laius, but when Teiresias finally reveals the truth, Oedipus strongly rejects it. Oedipus accuses the prophet of speaking in riddles, but what Teiresias straightforwardly proclaims is a riddle only to Oedipus, who must learn to accept the "riddle" as absolute truth and as an indicator of the power of the gods.

In Hamlet, the Ghost is not sent for to provide information, but he mysteriously appears and presents Hamlet with the truth about his father's death. As a prophet, the Ghost relates what must be done to right the wrong done to King Hamlet, and he instructs young Hamlet to be the avenger. Initially, Hamlet seems to believe in the prophet and wants to obey, but he, like Oedipus, doubts the message, and this doubt prompts his attempt to get firm evidence of Claudius' guilt.

Orr is the prophet figure in Catch-22; he is characterized not as a respected prophet nor as a mysterious spirit, but as a simpleton. Orr's appearance is deceiving, however, because he has great insight and a strong imagination. He knows that Yossarian must discover the answer himself. He never tells Yossarian a straightforward truth, such as, "I'm going to row to Sweden" or "You need an imagination like

mine." Instead, he provides Yossarian with a series of clues and hints, knowing that Yossarian will truly learn and be able to act on his learning only if he can put the pieces together himself. Yossarian finally understands the role of Orr and regrets that he did not have faith in him, just as Oedipus is ashamed of his disbelief in and poor treatment of Teiresias. The three prophets, then, play a key part in initiating the learning process of these three characters. After the prophet first appears, the learning process of each character either officially begins or accelerates. The prophet is like the spark of learning.

This spark can never set fire to a significant learning experience, however, unless a learner can overcome obstacles. Each of the three characters, much like normal human learners, is slowed in his learning because of preconceived notions, innate assumptions, that have never been challenged before his learning begins. Oedipus believes, for example, that he was reared by his natural parents, that he is innocent of the murder of Laius, and that his subordinates will do whatever is asked of them. When these beliefs are opposed, as, for example, when the herdsman will not divulge the information that Oedipus hopes to hear, Oedipus responds by allowing his anger and pride to interfere temporarily with his forward progress in learning.

Hamlet's preconceived notion is that cultural forms are satisfactory guides to his behavior. He is reared believing

that decorum and obedience are patterns of behavior which should always be followed. When this belief is destroyed by his own mother and uncle, Hamlet is left to himself for guidance. Hamlet's only real obstacle, then, is himself and his inexperience with the world. The world, more specifically "the system," poses Yossarian's greatest obstacle; his most limiting preconceived notion is his belief that "the system" will or can help him. Ironically, it is this same system which provides his most formidable obstacle to learning about his own capabilities. Yossarian's other obstacles, which are caused by his personal characteristics, are his cynicism, his undeveloped conscience, and his lack of faith in himself.

All three literary characters overcome their hindrances or obstacles to learning because each one has the intellect necessary to become engaged with his learning and to make it a total experience. Oedipus, Hamlet, and Yossarian have quality learning experiences because they are able to internalize their learning and become so comfortable with it that they are able to act on it. Their learning experiences are significant not because of their processes, not because they learn facts, but because of the results. Oedipus blinds himself in self-judgment to fulfill his own curse on the murderer and to demonstrate his understanding of the horror of his rejection of the gods. Oedipus wants to promote justice; thus he punishes himself. Likewise, Hamlet knows

justice is necessary, and he is not incapacitated by the awareness of his own impending death as he seeks to right the wrong that Claudius committed. For Hamlet to succeed in acting, his personality must be in balance, and he achieves that balance. The same is true for Yossarian, who needs equal parts of intellect, conscience, faith, and imagination, just as Hamlet needs intellect plus intuition. Yossarian also achieves a form of revenge as a result of his learning; he rejects the absurd system and creates his own meaning.

As demonstrated by these three great literary works, literature has much to teach us about learning, particularly about the learning problems and processes of literary learners, but also about the learning of all humans. In literature certain characteristics must be evident before the learning principles can be studied. The results of learning must be observable before significance can be measured, and the work should focus on a central heroic figure who is fully characterized and then clearly complicated and climaxed by problems. Although learning in many literary works may reach a climax, it can only reach a level of significant, qualitative learning if the character internalizes his learning and acts upon it. These characteristics of learning, as well as other important learning principles, are inherent in Oedipus the King, Hamlet, and Catch-22.

By studying these three works, it becomes clear that learning requires a problem, a challenge to one's habitual

responses and innate beliefs. Change can only occur if it is encouraged or required, as in the case of Oedipus when the oracle commands him to solve the murder of Laius; thus begins Oedipus' self-discovery and his learning process. Not only must the learner be incited to change, but he must be as willing to unlearn his past beliefs and responses as he is willing to accept and use the new. Before this dual willingness and acceptance can be accomplished, the learner must overcome deficiencies in his personality; for example, Hamlet must overcome his tendency to let his passion override his intellect.

Other major points about learning in Oedipus, Hamlet, and Catch-22 are, first, that the learning process is extremely fragile and delicate. A potential learner needs adequate preparation, including the establishment of problems--a reason for learning, for change. A learner must be ready, as Hamlet is ready, but he also should not be rushed at any point in the learning process. Literature shows us that there are crucial points in the learning process, points at which the slightest pressure may cause a learner to go either way--to succeed or fail in his learning. In literature, once a character fails, he may be given other chances, as Yossarian is given more than one chance to comprehend Orr's message.

With the deluge of learning theories available, it seems unlikely that anything "new" would be very impressive.

Instead of looking to the new and untried, or to the old and repetitious, however, a genuinely productive answer about how humans learn may lie in the classics, in the works of literary genius who wrote to teach us about human circumstances.

ENDNOTES

Notes

[1] Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of the World, trans. Joan Tomlinson (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929).

Jean Piaget, The Development of Thought: Equilabration of Cognitive Structures, trans. Arnold Rosin (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

[2] Gustav Freytag, Technique of the Drama, An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art, trans. E. J. MacEwan (Chicago: Griggs, 1908).

[3] Walter Horace Bruford, The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

Gordon O. Taylor, The Passages of Thought; Psychological Representation in the American Novel, 1870-1900 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Peter M. Axthelm, The Modern Confessional Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[4] John L. Somer and George J. Thompson, "Literature: A Model for Inquiry," an unpublished manuscript (Emporia, Kansas, 1984), p. 41. Subsequent references to this work will appear as "MS."

[5] MS., p. 86.

[6] MS., p. 85.

[7] MS., p. 85.

[8] Howard J. Stark, "The Anatomy of Catch-22," in A 'Catch-22' Casebook, eds. Frederick Kiley and Walter McDonald (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1973), p. 158. Subsequent references to this work appear as "Casebook."

[9] Stark, Casebook, p. 158.

[10] Stark, Casebook, p. 158.

[11] Michael J. Larsen, "Shakespearean Echoes in Catch-22," American Notes and Queries (17), 76-78.

[12] Larsen, 76.

[13] Quotation from Shakespeare is in Larsen, 77. The quotation from Catch-22 is from the Dell edition (New York, 1962), p. 177.

[14] Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949).

[15] Alister Cameron, "Self-Discovery in Action," in The Identity of Oedipus the King (New York: New York University Press, 1968), pp. 33-62.

R. P. Winnington-Ingram discusses the destiny of Oedipus, (Sophocles: An Interpretation) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 177.

Winnington-Ingram, pp. 184-204.

[16] Robert Graves, "The Myth of Oedipus," in Oedipus Myth and Dramatic Form, eds., James L. Sanderson and Everett Zimmerman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 3-9.

[17] The quotation is from Richmond Lattimore, "Sophocles: Oedipus Tyrrannus," in Oedipus Myth and Dramatic Form, eds. James L. Sanderson and Everett Zimmerman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 289.

See also Cameron, p. 51.

[18] C. M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 163.

[19] Bowra, p. 175.

[20] Charles Segal, Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[21] Bowra, p. 211.

[22] Lattimore, p. 291.

[23] Segal, pp. 207-08.

[24] Martin Kallich, et. al., Oedipus Myth and Drama (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1968), p. 3.

[25] David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, eds., The Complete Greek Tragedies, Vol. II, Sophocles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), ll. 774-813. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

[26] Bowra's analysis of Jocasta's character is that her "experience has discouraged her from believing in oracles. She believes that the oracle which foretold the death of Laius by their son has been nullified by facts. . . . Her unbelief is feminine and subjective, not based on any clear or argued doubt" (Bowra, p. 204). Winnington-Ingram comments that "Jocasta is intellectually superficial and Oedipus intellectually arrogant" (Winnington-Ingram, p. 183).

[27] Lattimore supports my contention that Oedipus concentrates only on Jocasta's words about the three roads; thus he misses her important clue regarding his ankles. He is preoccupied with remembering the conflict which took place on the road (Lattimore, pp. 287-88).

[28] The problem that Oedipus blinding himself presents to the interpretation of the drama has been frequently debated. Bowra attempts to disprove the views of Aeschylus and others that Oedipus acted out of madness and pure irrationality (Bowra, p. 182). He summarizes some of the controversy in his thorough coverage of the problem: "Both ancient and modern critics have thought Oedipus' action is wrong and should be condemned. . . . Modern critics . . . contend that in blinding himself Oedipus sins against the doctrine that men should accept what the gods decide" (Bowra, p. 177). Bowra believes, however, that the gods allow Oedipus a way to reconcile his mistakes with them; his self-blinding is

reconciliation, his way of attempting to "fit" into the ordered scheme of nature once more (Bowra, p. 177). Bowra goes on to say that "Oedipus blinds himself because of his curse," the curse he proclaims on the murder of Laius (ll. 236-54). Oedipus blinds himself, therefore, both deliberately and by divine prompting; "Apollo ordains; Oedipus fulfills" (Bowra, p. 182).

Lattimore agrees that Oedipus' self-blinding is an integral part of the drama and not a "negative" act. Lattimore draws an interesting parallel between the Sphinx's riddle and the blinding. Oedipus essentially turns into a feeble man, one who must be led, thus he has completed the cycle of the riddle and consequently the pattern of the drama (Lattimore, pp. 289-91).

R. P. Winnington-Ingram makes a strong case for the necessity of Oedipus' blinding himself in terms of his character. He contends "that it was in the nature of Oedipus to act, and to act at once; . . . it was a necessity for him to give immediate expression to his revulsion not in words but in action." He supports my view that it was "a characteristic act" of Oedipus to blind himself, "not an act of madness" (Winnington-Ingram, p. 177).

[29] A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1904), p. 54.

[30] C. S. Lewis, "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?" in Hamlet: Enter Critic, eds. Claire Sacks and Edgar Whan

(New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960) p. 170

[31] Lewis, p. 171.

[32] Lewis, p. 171.

[33] Bradley, pp. 74-86.

[34] Bradley, p. 83.

[35] Bradley, p. 86.

[36] Bradley, pp. 114-15.

[37] Bradley makes these observations, among many others, about the "pre-tragedy" Hamlet: " . . . he must normally have been charmingly frank, courteous and kindly to everyone. . . . [H]e was apt to be decided and even imperious if thwarted. . . . He must have always been fearless . . . (Bradley, p. 87). Maynard Mack notes that we have never seen the Hamlet which Ophelia describes:

> O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholars, eye, tongue,
> sword;
> The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
> (III.1. 158-61)

Mack says that "The passage invites us to remember that we have never actually seen such a Hamlet--that his mother's marriage has brought a falling off in him before we meet him. . . . Time was, the play keeps reminding us, when Denmark was a different place" (Maynard Mack, "The World of

Hamlet," in Shakespeare: Modern Essays In Criticism, ed. Leonard F. Dean [New York: Oxford University Press, 1961], p. 251).

[38] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1931), III.i. 19-20; all further references to this work appear in the text. With this line, Hamlet succinctly expresses the Renaissance notion of decorum. It is likely that Hamlet understands decorum in the Renaissance style: speaking and acting appropriately, depending on the occasion and the subject matter (William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature [New York: The Odyssey Press, 1961], p. 132). As Thrall and Hibbard point out, Renaissance authors were extremely careful to apply decorum to their works: "Beginning in the Renaissance the type to which a character belonged was regarded as a most important element in determining his qualities" (Thrall and Hibbard, p. 132).

[39] Bradley discusses Hamlet's intellectual power as a touch of "speculative genius," but one that only shows itself "fitfully." He says that Hamlet's ability shows itself as, "unusual quickness of perception, . . . as "wit or humour" . . . both occurring "in the form of imagination . . . " (Bradley, pp. 90-91).

[40] Bradley, p. 94.

[41] Bradley, p. 88.

[42] Bradley notes that Laertes and Fortinbras are "evidently designed to throw the character of the hero into relief." He discusses the "curious parallelism" of Fortinbras also having a father slain. A strong contrast is evident, though, "for both Fortinbras and Laertes possess in abundance the very quality which the hero seems to lack" (Bradley, pp. 70-71).

[43] Bradley, p. 357.

[44] Bradley, p. 358.

[45] Edward Hubler, Introd., The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark by William Shakespeare (Signet Classics, 1963), p. xxiv.

[46] In his review, Nelson Algren claimed that Catch-22 is "the best American novel that has come out of anywhere in years" (Nelson Algren, "The Catch," rev. of Catch-22, by Joseph Heller, in Casebook, pp. 3-5.

[47] Constance Denniston, "Catch-22: A Romance-Parody," in Casebook, pp. 51-57.

Eric Solomon, "From Christ in Flanders to Catch-22: An Approach to War Fiction," in Casebook, pp. 94-101.

[48] The quotation is from this article: Robert Protherough, "The Sanity of Catch-22," in Casebook, p. 210.

See also: Frederick R. Karl, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22:

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