Shakespeare

Third year- Second semester

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We are going to take *Hamlet*. It is written in 1601. It means that it is Elizabethan tragedy. The theme is not important and it is repeated all over the Shakespearean tragedies. There are two main themes in Hamlet. The first one is classicism versus humanism and the other one is order versus disorder. The 16th century was called the Renaissance. It is originally a French word which means rebirth. The 16th century was the age of the revival of classical literature. So, classical literature was reborn in the 16th century, how? The 16th century writers started to imitate the classical writers; from Greece and Rome in the period before the birth of Christ. For example, Aristotle and Plato were there before the birth of Christ. Aristotle was living in the 4th century before the birth of Christ that is why it is called classical literature. In his Poetics, he mentioned some remarks about classical literature. He said remarks but we consider these rules.

What is the job of any literary critic?

The literary critic criticizes the literary works, study them, and then talk about the rules that the writer should follow.

In every age writing is different. In the classical time they used to write in a certain way. In the 17th century, it was different, they started to use some modern elements and the way of writing was different. In the 18th century, there was a setback and they started to take things from classism. Nowadays, there are critics who write and we are making researches trying to give shape to what kind of writing people are using now. The post-contemporary (2001 to present) theory is not fully theorized now.

So, the literary critic tells us how to write and what is considered good or points of superiority and what is considered points of interiority or let us say what is good literature and what is bad literature.

So, Aristotle in the classical time talked about classical literature and he told us how writing should be in the classical period. What did he tell us, what did he write us in his *Poetics*?

As I told you in the 16th century, William Shakespeare and others considered classicism as something very important that should be imitated.

What did Aristotle say in his *Poetics*?

In the fourth century B.C, Aristotle said that philosophy is better than art and history and he claimed that the philosopher is the best in society because of the contemplating life of having good intellectual skills. We will see how this is reflected in *Hamlet*.

When we study Hamlet together, you will find that he is contemplating a lot to the extent that you will get bored of him. Some critics criticize *Hamlet* for this and they say that he is sick of inaction and other critics will say that he is a sort of the philosopher. If we take it from the classical point of view, according to Aristotle, he has intellectual skills that make him distinctive. So, you can take it in two ways; you can criticize him positively or negatively.

What does also Aristotle say?

**He says that one reaches truth through deduction.**

According to him, people should take rules for granted without questioning them. They build their own conclusions on them. This way of thinking spread in the classical period making people narrow-minded.

There was a way of thinking in the classical period which is deduction. They give you general rules and you take them for granted without questioning them. They built their own conclusion on them. This way of thinking spread in the classical period and they make people narrow-minded.

What happened in the 16th century?

The 16th century is the golden Age of drama and the Renaissance Age. The humanists in the 16th century were beyond progress. In the 16th century, humanism bore a new spirit of the age and shows man as powerful and one who has free will. So, man’s capabilities started to be trusted. This was the role of humanists in the 16th century. Nowadays, humanism has a different meaning (the rights of human, the rights of child, the rights of animals,….).

What is the position of man in the classical time?

Man was helpless. In classical drama, you will find that man is helpless and the gods has the upper hand. The gods make man suffer and the gods play with man’s fate or man’s destiny as if he is a toy in their hands. Even in any tragedy, the tragic hero should not be an ordinary man. But the tragic hero, according to the classicals, is semi-god or a superhuman. This is the new spirit of the age which appeared in humanists.

In the 16th century, the humanists rejected deduction and adopted the theory of induction which is anti-Aristotelian.

**What is induction?**

Through induction, one questions everything set. You question everything set to you. You question the given results.

We will study three humanists.

1. **The English Sir Francis Bacon:**

He wasa scientist and a philosopher. He says that one should suspect the given results then performs one’s own performance to reach truth. So, skepticism becomes a virtue, not a sin. Scientists keep questioning matters and take nothing for granted. Bacon also advised the scientists to avoid the four idols الأوهام; the cave, tribe, market, and theater.

By cave, he means that one should avoid illusions. By tribe, he means that one should question one’s traditions and not take it for granted. By market, he means that one should ignore rumors. By theater, he means that one should be oneself and should not be identified with any leader.

Sir Francis Bacon wants to say that this is the way to progress and to advance science.

**2-** **The Dutch Desiderius Erasmus:**

He was catholic. He rejected the idea of predestination in Catholicism. And he says that man is not helpless. He called people to adopt a liberal thought and believed in the power of man’s free will.

**3-The Italian Niccolò Machiavelli:**

He wrote his book T*he Prince* to advise an Italian prince to gain power and wealth by fooling people, bribing the government men and working secretly for his own self-interest. He convinces the prince that the aim justifies the means. According to him, materialism is justified and not regarded as a vice.

So, the position of man is the most important point in the 16th century. And another important point that in the 16th century, the humanists used to embrace all differences. They adopted classicism, medieval ideas and the 16th century new spirit.

Now what about classicism? We want to talk about Seneca. He was a Roman tragedian. William Shakespeare in his tragedy; Hamlet, imitated Seneca. He wrote a horror drama or drama of revenge (tragedy of revenge). Like Seneca’s tragedy, Shakespearean Hamlet consists of five acts. Although Seneca and the classicals use blank verse, William Shakespeare likes to mix blank verse with prose. In the play of Hamlet, he uses blank verse for the important characters or when people talk about philosophical matters.

The play of *Hamlet* is full of poetic diction. It is known that Shakespearean language is highly metaphorical. *Hamlet* has many classical allusions and references to the god and goddesses. William Shakespeare, like Seneca, used classical dramatic structure.

What is the classical dramatic structure?

The play starts with an exposition (act I, scene i). In the exposition, he introduces the main characters and themes. Then the events develop till they reach a climax. After that, the problem is solved and action falls down until it reaches the denouement. And in the middle, there is the concept of tragic hero.

According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must be semi-god or a superman, but William Shakespeare does not like this and he puts an ordinary man because he is a humanist. He believes that man is powerful and has free will of his own; the gods do not control man. But he agrees that man should be of a high rank. Hamlet is an ordinary man, Macbeth is an ordinary man, and Othello is an ordinary man. But he follows the classicals in making this hero a man of high rank because he wanted to affect the people; the tragic hero should affect the audience. For example, Macbeth is an important knight and Hamlet is a prince.

**The Elizabethan theater:** the stage was taking like shape as if it has three sides and the people used to sit in a horseshoe shape. The auditorium takes a horseshoe shape while they face each other to interact.

So, the auditorium is arranged in a horseshoe shape so that the spectators never lose sight of one another to experience catharsis in tragedy and share laughter in comedy.

According to Aristotle, the tragic hero is dominated by hamartia.

(Hamartia): excess of a trait in one’s character that harms him. So, this tragic flaw (**hamartia**) leads to the tragic hero’s downfall. The tragic hero arouses pathos in the audience’s heart. Then the audience experience catharsis (purification). Their souls are purged through feeling of pity and fear. They sympathize with the tragic hero in his disaster and gets scared lest they would face the same fate.

Is the fall of the tragic hero due to the power of the gods or due to a mistake he makes?

According to the classicals, it is due to the power of the gods. But William Shakespeare was a humanist and did not accept that, he took few things from the classicals but he refuses certain things. All his tragic heroes have free will, they make mistakes and because of this mistake they had a fall at the end.

Is there a poetic justice in the play?

Because he was a Christian, William Shakespeare liked to apply poetic justice and we will see that when we read the play.

I forgot to tell you that the tragic hero always experiences **exterior or interior conflicts.**

So, we talked about classicism versus humanism, what about order versus disorder?

Order versus disorder:

These ideas are from the medieval ages and it is found in William Shakespeare. The medieval features are there in the 16th century.

The Middle Ages=early middle ages, middle middle ages and late middle ages).

The middle ages which the people talk about are from the 11th century until the 15th century. It was dark ages for Europe. And then in the 16th century, we have the renaissance and we will see the effects of the effects and ideas of middle ages. And in the 17th century, which is the restoration period, we will see medieval ideas. And the 18th century is the Neo-classical period and we will see medieval features in the 18th century drama. And I do not think that you will find it in the 19th century. The end of the 19th century is the beginning of the modern period.

Now, what is the Great Chain of being?

It was believed that there was a Great Chain of being with God on the top of it and then the angels, man, animals, plants, matter. Matter at the end of it pulls the chain down and God pulls it up and the chain should be tight all the time. In every item of this, there is gradation. So, the Great Chain of being is arranged due to hierarchies. Inside every item, there is gradation.

God

Man (king prince knight --------- slave)

Animals

Plans

matter

According to the Great Chain of being, everybody should stick to his place. If one changes his place, disorder prevails. In Hamlet, we will see that disorder is prevailing. When somebody changes his place in the great chain of being, a knot occurs. And it is still there until God pulls up tightly and matter pulls down tightly and so the knot is undone. This is what will happen at the end of the play.

King Hamlet; the father of Hamlet, usurped the throne of Denmark. So, chaos and disorder prevailed. According to the people in the middle ages, chaos that happens in microcosm is transferred to the macrocosm. And supernatural elements are shown. After taking the thorn of Denmark, king Hamlet; the father, was killed by his brother. His brother killed him and he married his widow (Hamlet’s mother). And Hamlet will know that his uncle killed his father and he will think of revenge. I want to talk about the influence of Seneca. Like Seneca, Shakespeare made his tragedy bloody. Seneca’s tragedies are full of bloodletting, horror, ghosts, and feigned madness.

This knot is our introduction to Hamlet.

الشكر لجميع الطالبات اللاتي يقدرن المجهود الذي أقوم به و اللاتي لم يقمن بعمل مجموعات للاشتراك في أيا من المواد التي أقوم بتفريغها و سأعمل جاهدة لكي أكون باذن الله عند حسن ظنكن بي و أتمنى التوفيق للجميع باذن الله

و لا أقول الا حسبي الله و نعم الوكيل على من لم تقدر هذا المجهود