Shakespeare

Third year- Second semester

Hamlet

The 2nd lecture: د.منى حشيش

What is the position of Hamlet? He is a prince, so he has a high rank.

‘*Hamlet*’ is a tragedy. In classical tragedies, there is a tragic hero and in the Shakespearian tragedies, there is also a tragic hero but because William Shakespeare is a humanist, he makes some changes in the characteristics of his tragic hero. So, his tragic hero is not totally typical. For example, in classical tragedy, the hero must be either a semi-god or a superhuman, but William Shakespeare, because he is a humanist, he believed that an ordinary person of high rank can affect people as well and an ordinary person is powerful. So, he makes Hamlet as his tragic hero, he is neither a semi-god nor a superhuman; he is an ordinary human being. However, he has a high rank. However William Shakespeare followed Aristotle in the fact that he always makes his tragic heroes in his tragedies of high rank in society to affect the audience and help them experience catharsis.

In the 16th century and in the classical time, they used to believe that if the hero is not of a high rank, he will not affect the audience. But this idea has changed in and modern drama. The drama becomes the drama of the marginalized المهمشين( the beggars, the vagabonds, the homosexuals, lesbians, woman).

Now let us read ‘Hamlet’ and what is happening. ‘Hamlet’ starts with chaos. All the play starts in disorder and it reveals to us the knot in the Chain of being. I told you before because William Shakespeare is a humanist; he combines ideas from different cultural backgrounds. So, he involves medieval ideas and new humanist ideas and Christian ideas, all these together. It was like a general trait in the age of the 16th century to adopt all these different ideas together, not only William Shakespeare but also his colleagues; Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson,.. All those people were humanists like him. They used to make this mixture to reflect the age because the age was like this. After the middle Ages, people could not get rid of the medieval ideas. They kept on believing on them. So, here William Shakespeare discusses an important medieval idea which is the control of the Great Chain of being on the world (the world the microcosm and the macrocosm; the universe). So, there is a knot in the Chain of being.

Now, go to the characters in the play:-

We will meet the character who is the Ghost of Hamlet and this means that there are two Hamlets in the play; the father and the son. I like to call the father ‘the late king Hamlet of Denmark’. We have Scandinavia. The top of Europe; Scandinavia, was divided into three kingdoms; Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. In the 16th century, we come to know that the late king of Norway (in this play, we are not told about Sweden) was Fortinbras. He was controlling Denmark and Norway together. What happened is that the late king Hamlet took Denmark from the late king of Norway; Fortinbras. So, late king Hamlet made a sin. He is a sinful according to the Great Chain of being. He changed his place in the Great Chain of being. He usurped a right which is not his and he removed and displaced the rightful king; the late king Fortinbras. This made a knot in the Great Chain of being until God pulls the Chain up tightly and matter pulls it down tightly. To undo the knot, it will take the whole play. So, here we get to know the ghost of late king Hamlet. Claudius is the brother of the late king Hamlet. Late King Hamlet has a son called Hamlet. We have Polonius who is the counselor of the king. Laertes is the son of Polonius and Ophelia is the daughter of Polonius. She is loved by Hamlet. Reynaldo is a Servant to Polonius. Horatio is a friend of prince Hamlet. The names are Danish.

The Danes= the Danish people.

The place is the castle of Elsinore in Denmark. The time is night.

At the beginning, we find soldiers on duty going to and fro. They talk together but they give us feeling of tension. From the speech we know that Marcellus and Bernardo saw the late of king Hamlet at time for two successive nights. They went and told Horatio that they saw the ghost of the late king for two successive nights. Horatio does not believe that there is a walking ghost. This is his character; he is very reasonable. So, they asked Horatio to attend the third night with them to see the ghost himself. So, at the beginning Horatio told them it is ‘but your fancy’. In the third night, he saw the ghost of late king Hamlet. When he saw it (he could not deny), he saw that it might be a devil or something but it really looks like the late king Hamlet. So, he realized that it is the late king Hamlet. He wants the ghost to talk to him and tells him why it walks around.

P5

Act I scene i is the exposition of the play. So, in this act, we come to know who the main characters are and what the main events are. So, those three soldiers while talking let the audience know many things about what is happening. So, they talk here about Fortinbras of Norway. They say that Fortinbras of Norway is the enemy of Denmark. In this page, Horatio says that the situation in Denmark is like the situation in Norway. It is ironical that the father king died in Norway as the one of Denmark and instead of having his son ruling after him, his brother came to throne. So, the crown princes could not rule the countries. The late king’s brothers came to throne. Horatio says that what happens in Denmark is repeated in Norway. He passes important information to audience. He says that the young prince Fortinbras is very enthusiastic and zealous to restore Denmark to Norway. And this young prince Fortinbras represents a threat to Denmark.

What is about the brother of Fortinbras; the uncle who rules? He does not really care for restoring Denmark.

We will see at the end of the play that this little prince Fortinbras will play an important role in the play. What happens in the exposition is like a hint at what will happen at the end of the play. Horatio is scared lest the appearance of the ghost means that something bad will happen. He says that it might be a bad omen. I believe that the Elizabethans believe that the appearance of the ghost indicates chaos; disorder, in the macrocosm because it is a supernatural element. So, he calls this a supernatural element. Scene I ends with Horatio insisting to his friends that they should tell prince Hamlet about this and asks them to keep that as a secret until they go and tell prince Hamlet. So, this is the exposition. In the exposition, we knew the main characters and we knew the main event which is the appearance of the ghost and there is an element of suspense here. The audience and the characters want to know why this ghost appears. The ghost has refused to talk to Horatio or to his other friends Marcellus and Bernardo, but they think that it might talk to Hamlet.

In scene II, we find a celebration. King Claudius; brother of the late king Hamlet, celebrates his coronation and marriage to the queen Gertrude. She was his sister-in-law and then she became his wife. According to the Christians, this is incest. It is very odd to marry the brother of her husband. And also the Christians find it is very strange that cousins get married and this is incest according to them. So, here Hamlet called this incest. Prince Hamlet is deeply sad because after two months from his father’s death her mother forgot her sadness on her husband and he married his brother; king Claudius. He is also very sad because this is incest in Christianity. It means that Hamlet is a good Christian. Hamlet is sad also because he lost his right to become king of Denmark. So, there are three factors that make Hamlet extremely sad.

Hamlet appeared for the first time in scene ii. Both his uncle and his mother blame Hamlet for being extremely sad; melancholic. You can say according to the theory of humors, Hamlet got excess of the earthly element; dust in his body and this made him melancholic.

In this scene, the king tells Hamlet that his long mourning is not manly. He keeps on bothering Hamlet and he makes him feels that he (Claudius) is senseless.

On page 25

I want to read with you important quotation. It is soliloquy because everybody left.

{Exeunt all but Hamlet}

“Hamlet: O, that this too too solid flesh would melt

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Or that the Everlasting had no fix’d

His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!”

Elizabethan dramatists like William Shakespeare imitated the classical dramatists in creating explicit drama which involves several asides and soliloquies. Both the classicals and the Elizabethans like to feed the audience with all information and to make sure that the character’s thoughts are not hidden from them.

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,

Seem to me all the users of this world!

Fit on’t! ah fie! ’tis an unweeded garden,

That grows to seed;

Let me not think on’t- Frailty, thy name is woman!-

Frailty= الضعف

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she follow’d my poor father’s body,

Like Niobe, all tears:-why she, even she-

O, God! A beast, that wants discourse of reason,

Would have mourn’d longer-

He says that the animal that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer. She is less than an animal. He despises his mother. He is very upset of her. He mocked her. He says that in that Great Chain of being, she does not fit to belong to man; she is less than a beast.

Married with my uncle,

My father’s brother, but no more like my father

Than I to Hercules:

He ridicules his uncle also. He says that he is nothing if he is compared to his late father.

Within a month:

Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,

He says that she stopped crying over his late father very quickly.

She married. O, most wicked speed, to post

With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

It is not nor it cannot come to good:

But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

So, he cannot tell them what he thinks of. He cannot go to his mother and tell her that he despises her; he tries to hold his tongue. He notices that it is improper to go to his mother and tell her these words. He cannot confront her and he cannot confront his uncle but he sees that what he has done is a religious crime; incest, and at the same time it is illegal crime because he rose to power while it is his right. It is the right of crown prince to rise to power. So, this soliloquy is important because it shows the inner conflict of Hamlet.

Then enter Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo and they start talking together. From the speech, we find Hamlet tells Horatio that his is fellow student. It means that they are studying together. And we know here that both of them go to the university and study in Germany in a place called Wittenberg. So, Hamlet asks Horatio why he left studying and came. He says that he comes to mourn the late king. He did not say that he came for the marriage celebration and the coronation celebration. But Hamlet understands and he says you do not want to insult me and tell me that you come for celebrating coronation and marriage. So, Horatio is a very good friend. He is sincere in his love to Hamlet and he started to tell him about the ghost. He told him that his late father’s ghost or spirit appeared for three days now. We realized that it started to appear since kind Claudius made the celebration. Horatio tells Hamlet about the ghost and Hamlet asks Horatio and his friends to describe the ghost for him. So, they say that it looks exactly like late king Hamlet and he is armed from top to toe wearing the war uniform. And he is more sad than angry.

P35

At the end of scene ii:

{Exeunt all but Hamlet.}

Hamlet:

“My father’s spirit in arms! All is not well;”

There is chaos.

“I doubt some foul play: would the night were come!

Till then sit still, my soul: foul deeds will rise,

Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.”

He suspects that something bad will happen. Hamlet promised his friends to go that night to the same place where they see the ghost. He is full of suspense; he wants to know what the ghost will tell him whether he will talk to him or not. He wants to see his father’s spirit.

In scene iii, we have other characters Laertes; the son of Polonius talking to his sister Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius. And we have Polonius; the counselor of the king. Laertes studies in France but he came for the festivals and then he will go back. So, when he came, he went to his sister Ophelia. Ophelia is young and green; naïve. He goes and tells her not to submit to Hamlet. He knows that Hamlet loves her and it seems to everyone that this is a shallow love. Laertes guesses that since Hamlet has not seen Ophelia for long time because he was in Germany, he might try to seduce Ophelia after that long period. Laertes is a young man, so he understands how young man thinks. So, he suspects that Hamlet might try to develop his relationship with Ophelia. He warns his sister against Hamlet approaches. He tells her that Hamlet is imbalanced now and he might try to dishonor her. Ophelia promises her brother to remain chaste and virtuous and show little emotion to Hamlet; she will control herself. Polonius also thinks that Hamlet has just a pasting interest in Ophelia because he has not talked of any royal marriage. Polonius also told his daughter not to trust Hamlet. He feels that Ophelia will either be jilted or seduced at the end because she is naïve in experience.

Let us go to the ghost where it appears.

Hamlet went at midnight. He went to meet his three friends; Marcellus, Bernardo, and Horatio. At midnight the ghost reappeared from the 4th night. We know that it started to appear since the beginning of the festivals of the celebration of coronation and marriage. It seems that coronation and marriage hurt the king. Marcellus says that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark. He talks about disorder in the microcosm which leads to disorder in the macrocosm. The ghost indicates to the disorder in the macrocosm. I told you that according to the people in the middle Ages, what happens in the microcosm affects the macrocosm and what happens in the macrocosm related to what happens in the microcosm. And this is what Marcellus says when he says that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark.

The ghost does not talk to any one of them but he looked at Hamlet and he beckons him; he waves to him to follow him to some spot. Hamlet was following and Horatio advises him not to go; he tells him Hamlet, do not go, and he wants to keep him.

P49

Horatio wants to stop Hamlet.

Horatio: Do not, my lord.

Hamlet: why, what should be the fear?

I do not set my life in a pin’s fee;

And for my soul, what can I do to that,

Being a thing immortal as itself?

It waves me forth again: I’ll follow it.

Horatio: what if it tempted you toward the flood, my lord,

Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff

That beetles o’er his base into the sea,

And there assume some other horrible form,

Which might deprive you sovereignty of reason

And draw you into madness? Think of it:

The very place puts toys of desperation,

Without more motive, into every brain

That looks so many fathoms to the sea

And hears it roar beneath.

طب لو أخدتك لمسقطة مياه أو أخدتك على حفة جبل و لما تروح عند حفة الجبل ممكن يطلعلك شكل غريب يخوفك و ممكن يخليك تتجنن.

Hamlet: it waves me still.

Go on; I’ll follow thee.

Marcellus: you shall not go, my lord.

Hamlet: hold off your hands.

Horatio: Be ruled; you shall not go.

Hamlet: my fate cries out, ((قدري بناديني

And makes each petty artery in this body

As hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve.

Still am I call’d. unhand me, gentleman.

{Enter *GHOST* and *HAMLET*.}

Hamlet: Where wilt thou lead me? Speak; I’ll go no further.

Ghost: Mark me.

Hamlet: I will.

Ghost: My hour is almost come,

When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames

Must render up myself.

He does not live in heaven; he is living in hell. He is punished.

Hamlet: alas, poor ghost!

Ghost: Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing

To what I shall unfold.

Hamlet: Speak; I am bound to hear.

Gost: So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

حتاخد قرار الانتقام لما تسمع يلي حقولوا

Do not forget that this is the effect of Seneca; drama of revenge.

Hamlet: What?

Ghost: I am thy father’s spirit,

Doom’s for a certain term to walk the night,

And for the day confined to fast in fires,

Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

Are burnt and purged away.

مسموحلي أمشي بالليل في وقت محدد. و بقية اليوم بقضيه في النار لغية ما أطهر من الخطيئة يلي ارتكبتها

It is clear that he is sinful. What is his sin? It is not mentioned, but we understand that he has usurped the crown of Denmark. He removed the rightful king Fortinbras from his place in the Great Chain of being. So, he is tortured.

Hamlet: O God!

Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Hamlet: Murder!

He starts to tell him that he was murdered and did not die naturally.

Ghost: Murder most foul, as in the best it is;

But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

The death is unnatural because the one who killed him is his brother.

Hamlet: Hast me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love,

May sweep to my revenge.

Ghost: The serpent that did sting thy father’s life

Now wears his crown.

في حية قرصت والدك في حياته و موتتوا و هي لابسه التاج بتاعو

So, the ghost told him that he was murdered by the uncle.

Hamlet: O my prophetic soul!

My uncle!

Ghost: Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,

With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,-

O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power

So to seduce!-won to his shameful lust

The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen:

The late king Hamlet talks very well of his widow.

O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!

From me, whose love was of that dignity

That it went hand in hand even with the vow

I made to her in marriage, and to decline

Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor

To those of mine!

Claudius is much less than me; he is nothing in comparison with me. And he blames Gertrude a little bit. He says she is virtuous but she was seduced by my brother.

P57, line 74:

Ghost: Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand

Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch’d:

Cut off even in the blossoms of y sin,

O, horrible! I, horrible! Most horrible!

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be

A couch for luxury and damn incest.

But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive

Against thy mother aught: *leave her to heaven*

He advised Hamlet not to ill-treat mother or to talk badly to her; not to do any harm to the Queen Gertrude.

And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,

To prick and sting her.

She will gain the results of what she has done.

Fare thee well at once!

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near, الصباح قرب يجي

And ‘gins to pale his uneffectual fire:

Adieu, adieu! Hamlet remember me.

Adieu= it is a French word and it means goodbye.

And the ghost left.

Hamlet: O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?

And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;

And you, my sinew, grow not instant old,

But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat

In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

Yea, from the table of my memory

I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, of forms, all pressures past,

Unmix’d with baser matter: yes, by heaven!

O most permicious woman!

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!

So, here Hamlet is shocked and he talks as if in hallucinations. It might be an example of his assumed madness. This is the effect of Seneca. William Shakespeare imitated Seneca in making his heroes assume madness. After saying so, Hamlet did not tell his friends what the ghost has told him. He kept it for himself. He did not tell them that it is Claudius who killed his father but he asked them to swear not to tell anybody about the appearance of the ghost. So, they say okay, we will not say. And then they heard the ghost from beneath the stage crying swear. So, they swore for the first time then they heard it again saying, swear. He asked them to swear three times. In all religions, when you swear for three times, it is for confirmation.

In the ghost scene, Horatio’s and Hamlet’s ways of thinking are contrasted.

Horatio kept on telling Hamlet not to go. He kept on assuming that that ghost might kill Hamlet. He adopts a rationalistic philosophy. Horatio follows an inductive way of thinking. He has been skeptic. This is clear when Horatio tells Marcellus and Bernardo at the very beginning that this appearance of the ghost is but their fancy, then he suspected that the ghost might kill Hamlet by taking Hamlet to the flood or making him jump from the summit of a cliff.

On the contrary, Hamlet is traditional in following a deductive way of thinking. When he sees the ghost obeys his orders and decide to follow it without questioning the matter. Hamlet says my fate cries out. He submits to the ghost call as if submitting to the gods’ will. Hamlet overlooks Horatio’s rationalizing explanation and takes the ghost words for granted and with awe.

In the last lecture, we said that there are two ways of thinking. The first on is deduction which is the classical way of thinking (Aristotle) and the second one is the inductive way of thinking (Sir Francis Bacon). So, we can say that this is the influence of Sir Francis Bacon on William Shakespeare on Horatio. Do not forget that Horatio is a scholar. And Hamlet is also a scholar but he is until now traditional in his way of thinking (his character may develop). Horatio is influenced by Sir Francis Bacon. Horatio does not listen to rumors when his friends Marcellus and Bernardo told him that they have seen a ghost, he decided to see it himself. He avoids what Sir Francis Bacon calls the idol of the market. He follows a scientific approach and realizes truth by himself. When he suspects the ghost’s intention with Hamlet, he is only trying to reach truth through skepticism. And this shows that Horatio is a highly intellectual person.

What about Hamlet: Hamlet is so far an ordinary tragic hero. His way of thinking is traditional until now.

Please prepare act two for act II for next time.

Thank you for attending and see you next time.