Reflective Statements

1. Reflective Statement on Broken April, by Ismail Kadare

Prior to the interactive oral on 'Broken April' I was intrigued by various questions which arose during my reading of the novel. I was particularly interested in the traditions of the Kanun, which were a central aspect of Albanian lives in the novel. Our discussion focused on the 'blood feud' and I was surprised to learn that this barbaric practice is still carried out on modern Albania. However, I discovered that many of its original terms, such as its aim of reconciliation, are forgotten in modern times and it is now sometimes used as a simple justification for murder. Although the novel is set in an earlier era, the theme of the blood feud's disintegration and corruption is present throughout. The theme is particularly emphasised through the 'blood steward', Mark Ukacierra, who blames it on the increasing influence of modern cities. By learning about the corruption of the modern blood feud, and comparing it with its original traditions, I gained a deeper insight into the significance of the conflict between traditional and modern societies in the novel.

During my reading of the novel, I was fascinated by the characters of Bessian and Gjorg and their contrasting perspectives of the Kanun, which further highlight the tension between traditional and modern. Through our discussions I learnt that the status of a guest is highly ordered according to the Kanun. This led me to think that Bessian was taking advantage of the Kanun. On discovering the significance of mythology as a feature of Albanian heritage, we discussed to what extent the Kanun appeared more of a figment of mythology than a reality. Our discussion made me realise that the contrast of Bessian's mythological perspective of the Kanun, exploiting it for his own benefit, with the reality of the Kanun from Gjorg's perspective, once again characterises the clash between tradition and modernity.

The oral also covered ways in which Kadare had been involved in national politics, which were under communist control for most of his life. Upon discovering that Kadare had often opposed the communist regime, we discussed whether Kadare's personal experience was reflected in the novel. I learned that Kadare had been temporarily banned from writing, shortly before publishing 'Broken April' due to his criticism of the regime. I recognised that his own views towards Albanian politics were reflected in Gjorg's subtle resentment of the Kanun.

393 words

2. Reflective Statement on Chekhov Short Stories

Through the Interactive Oral, I came to understand that Chekhov uses characters throughout his stories to emphasise culture and society of Russian life in the late 1800's. Our class discussion focused on culture and society.

Chekov has been criticised as a writer of very depressing social scenes. I believe he uses characters to play out roles where society contradicts itself. Throughout 'The Chorus Girl' he describes the pity of a girl named Pasha; he uses contrasts between characters to emphasise the different status of each character. Kolpakov
addresses Pasha has if it were her fault and that she should feel guilty; Kolpakov says to Pasha, "you low creature." This is ironic because he is the one being unfaithful to his wife and he should be the one society frowns upon, rather than Pasha. We discussed the role of women and how Chekhov thought about them in society.

The last paragraph of 'The Chorus Girl' effectively shows the faults in society and the fact that the abuse of the chorus girl is not a one-time occurrence. The use of this reverse-epilogue shows that society has done nothing but damaging things to the chorus girls and no one can help them from being abused; the disloyalty of the husband should have been the highlighted fault but instead society seems to blame the wrong person.

In another of Chekov's stories, 'The Darling', he describes a protagonist named Olenka Plemyannikov who is the embodiment of female disempowerment. She cannot seem to make up her mind on her own beliefs and she only adapts to what her partner believes. She has had several husbands: the theatre owners Kukin and the timber merchant Pustovalov. She is nicknamed 'the darling' which lowers her status in society as she is compared to a favourite pet. We talked about disillusionment and how Chekov shows that society is a depressing place through Olenka always being rejected.

Chekov manages to make readers change their views on social attitudes. To conclude, I believe that he wants to show the bleak view for women in Russian society at the time.

(350 words)