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## Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays

### Week 1 Introduction – Transcript

>>[Text on screen] Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays. Week 1: Introduction.

>>[Text on screen] We are very proud to bring you the perspectives of authors from around the world, and trust that you will find their perspectives valuable. Because some of our contributing authors are nonnative speakers of English, we suggest that you turn on video captions. You can turn on captions by clicking the “cc” button at the bottom right of the video.

>>[Text on screen] Glossary of Terms on Week 1 Videos Page.

>>During our class videos you may hear our poets and playwrights use terms that are new to you. We've created a list of key terms and definitions that you can refer to at any point during our video lectures. This list is available on the videos and readings class page, where you can read it or download it as a PDF. If you would like to find and review these terms as you watch each class video, you can stop this video, go back to the videos and readings class page, and download the PDF. There you can play this video and each of the following class videos. If you have any questions about these terms, we encourage you to ask your teaching team in the weekly class discussions.

>>Welcome back to Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays. This is Block A, and it's Week 1. And we'll be dealing thematically with inclusions and exclusions, developing identities in communities.

>>And for craft topics, we'll be looking at voice and address. We'll be experimenting with voice, the "I" of the writer and the "you" of the reader, the persona poem, the letter poem, the dramatic monologue. This is a way to enter a play, enter a poem, how to draw the reader and the audience in, how to create a believable voice. And in this way I'm often thinking of the wonderful Greek poet Constantine Cavafy, who wrote a lot of persona poems, one you may know already: the great poem addressed to Odysseus on his way home to Ithaka, which begins,

"As you set out for Ithaka  
hope your road is a long one,  
full of adventure, full of discovery.  
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,  
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:  
you'll never find things like that on your way  
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,  
as long as a rare excitement  
stirs your spirit and your body."

So what Cavafy does right off the bat is he creates a voice that you can't ever get out of your head—it's in your ear forever—and he's advising Odysseus to think differently about this long journey home which is the subject of THE ODYSSEY. It goes, you know, he's always upset about the amount of time it takes him to get home, but Cavafy is saying, think about it in a different way. So that's one of the ways a monologue can become an entry point into a poem.

>>In plays we'll be experimenting with voice in monologue, with the invitational monologue, entering into a play, as we do into a poem, or the world of the play, as we do into the world of the poem. And asking how we draw the audience in to this world, how we create this believable voice, but also how to present the world to them.

>>And one way to think about, again, that intersection between poetry and plays is a poem that we'll provide a link to by the great Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert called "Elegy of Fortinbras," and it comes straight out of the last scene of Hamlet, Fortinbras has to clean things up, and it's clear to me that Herbert got a lot of his inspiration not just from Shakespeare, but also from Cavafy, thinking how am I going to make a poem, write a monologue that will bring a world to life. And this begins: "Now that we're alone we can talk prince man to man..." And remember, Hamlet is dead. "though you lie on the stairs and see no more than a dead ant." That voice, immediately recognizable, taking a character—in fact a minor character from the end of a play—and using him to talk about larger issues. This is one of the things that poets and playwrights have in common.

>>Yes, and also in terms of monologue. In the beginning, you mentioned the Greeks; at the beginning of so many great plays is the monologue that tells the audience where you are, what happened, and sometimes even what the story is before the play starts.

>>Giving you some road signs.

>>Yes.

>>Onward!