

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

Week 2 Introduction – Transcript

>>[Text on screen] Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays. Week 2: 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 2 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! It's Week 2, and we're talking about inclusions and exclusions, developing identities in communities, especially in communities. And we're going to begin with a dialogue from BLOOD WEDDING.

[Text on screen] Analyzing a Dialogue: BLOOD WEDDING by Federico García Lorca.

BRIDEGROOM: "Mother."

MOTHER: "What?"

BRIDEGROOM: "I'm off."

MOTHER: "Where to?"

BRIDEGROOM: "To the vineyard."

MOTHER: "Wait."

BRIDEGROOM: "What is it?"

MOTHER: "Your lunch, my son."

BRIDEGROOM: "Never mind. I'll eat grapes. Give me a knife."

MOTHER: "Why?"

BRIDEGROOM: "To cut them."

MOTHER: "Knives, knives... Curse them all, and the fool who invented them..."

BRIDEGROOM: "Let's change the subject."

MOTHER: "And shotguns, and pistols, and little razors, and even hoes and winnowing hooks."

BRIDEGROOM: "Fine."

MOTHER: "Whatever can cut through a man's body, a lovely man, in the flower of his life, who is off to the vines or the olives, because they are his, his family's...."

BRIDEGROOM: "You've missed the point."

MOTHER: "...and he doesn't return. Or if he does return it's so we can lay a palm leaf or a big plate of salt on him so the body won't swell. I don't know how you can carry a knife about you, or why I have these serpent's teeth in my kitchen."

BRIDEGROOM: "Are you done yet?"

MOTHER: "If I lived a hundred years I could speak of nothing else. First, your father, who brought me the scent of carnations, and enjoyed me three short years, and then, your brother...is it right, is it possible that so small a thing as a pistol or a knife can do for a man, a bull of a man? I'll never be quiet. The months pass and pain still pricks my eyes, to the very roots of my hair."

BRIDEGROOM: "Are we finished?"

>>You aren't finished. This dialogue will continue as this mother tries, in her way, to keep the son from bringing the knife out to the vineyard, when he only wants to go out and continue their livelihood.

>>And we know from the start that once the knife is introduced, tragedy will follow.

>>Yes, and tragedy is in their past, as well. This week we'll introduce dialogue in this way to use as a building block, using voices to build a scene, to evoke community and the communities that these scenes take place in. In this scene we know they're in an agricultural community, we know it's rural, we know that the stakes are very high—that knife is going to cut the olives or the grapes or whatever is going to bring their livelihood—right from the beginning.

>>[Text on screen] Dialogue and Poetry: "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" by W.B. Yeats.

>>And a dialogue can be a way to construct a poem, too. When we're thinking about the building blocks of a poem—when we're thinking about voice, about modes of address, about shifts in pace, or an imported implication, turns and counter-turns. As we mentioned early in the course, Yeats wrote not only poems, but also plays, and in his "Dialogue of Self and Soul" I think we see, in miniature, the kind of thing that can happen on the stage. So the poem begins from the point of view of:

"*My Soul*. I summon to the winding ancient stair;
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;"

So he's beginning to build this poem and knowing that the soul is speaking, well, the self is going to have to reply. That's a way to build a poem: put two monologues next to each other, see where they connect and where they diverge.

>>Right, and another way we can look at dialogue is in the chorus of the Greek play.

>>Exactly.

>>Where the community comes in—first one part of the community to give their way of seeing the events that have happened or the way the world is playing out; and then another set of community members enters in the chorus, and the alternating ways of seeing.

>>Exactly, and they are enforcing societal norms, they're giving us a sense of where the boundaries might be, and what the consequences might be when someone transgresses those boundaries.

>>Right, they're also a point and counter-point, and the possibility that the audience might agree with one side and not agree with the other, or they may see both ways of seeing.

>>Yeah. Onward!