



**INTERNATIONAL  
WRITING PROGRAM**

Shambaugh House  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-2020  
319-335-0128 Fax 319-335-3843  
[www.uiowa.edu/~iwp](http://www.uiowa.edu/~iwp)

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

Welcome Video – Transcript

>>[text on screen: Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays]

>>[text on screen: How this MOOC works]

>>[text on screen: We are proud to bring you the perspectives of authors from around the world and trust that you will find their perspectives valuable. Because some of the 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: Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays]

>>[text on screen: Welcome Video]

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>>Welcome to Power of the Pen: Identities and Social Issues in Poetry and Plays. My name is Christopher Merrill and as the director of the international writing program at the IWP at the University of Iowa, it's my great pleasure to welcome you to IWP's online writing summer in honor of our fiftieth anniversary.

>>I'm Lisa Schlesinger and I'm a professor of playwriting here at the Iowa Playwrights Workshop here at the University of Iowa and you might wonder why we're talking about playwriting and poetry together; sometimes I wonder about that myself, but playwriting and poetry have a long history of intertwining and overlapping and being connected through language, through epic, through ode, through song, through storytelling, and through memory.

>>And so through the exploration of the individual poetic voice and community created by a play, we'll have the chance to think about the ways in which poetry and plays may or may not bear on one another. And as we approach the craft of writing, this MOOC will encourage you to experiment in both poetry writing and play writing, it'll encourage you to explore the intersections of poetic and dramatic forms, will foreground some of the principles of writing poetry and plays, some of which will apply across the board. We'll offer weekly writing assignments in both genres. We hope to provide a space for small group collaboration. This is a place where we create a community of kindred spirits if you will. And more than anything, we hope this will support your experience of creative and cultural exchange with writers from all around the world.

>>And in addition to working on craft we're considering and regarding writing on identities and social issues so we'll be thinking about and encouraging you to explore these intersections of individual community and global identities and exchanges. We'll encourage you to examine the effect of current social issues on individual, community, and global identities. And we'll encourage you to consider how writing can be used to articulate and unite individual identities for ~~your~~ community empowerment and for action.

>>Because no writing takes place in a vacuum. And what we hope to do over the course of these weeks in both the writing of poetry and of plays, is to think about that larger context in which all literary work arises. When we first began to talk about this MOOC, one of the things that I had in mind was the story I heard long ago about the Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats who, it is said, would write plays and then remove the scaffolding of the play and keep the lyrics. Now that may be an apocryphal story but I love the idea that he sought that scaffolding in order to get the poems written, but he also had to be decidedly political competent to this in the creation of the Irish National Theatre which he and his friends put together, and they very much understood between the individual lyric voice of the poem, and the community created by a play, there was a lot of material they might be covering.

>>Yeah that's a fascinating story because I think that also understand the many playwrights who in order to create the world of the play will enter it through poetry, creating a mini world of all the very essences of what the play world will become, beginning very small and condense and then building scaffolding around that.

>> And I also think of the great Nobel Laureate, the poet Derek Walcott, and also the playwright. He grows up in St. Lucia in the Caribbean, and he's desperate to be a part of that glorious English poetic tradition, which for him is encapsulated in Shakespeare, but very early on he also creates his own theater company because he wants to be a part of that larger community.

>>Right and another example is Garcia Lorca, who created those identities through the voices of characters like her almost in a poetic way.

>>[to Lisa] So what do you think a playwright can take from a poet? And I'll to try to think what a poet can take from a playwright.

>>First of all, I think economy of language and beauty of language. World building. Lyricism. Form. Structure.

>>Maybe a certain kind of music too, right?

>>Yes, absolutely, musicality!

>>And I think from a playwright I'm always thinking as a poet that I'm being reminded of the importance of that world. There's a way in which a poet in his or her own study can be wrapped up in his/her own world and I'm thinking about again a story about Walcott who would write early in the morning and also make his paintings, but when a play was going into production, he had to be there as well so he could be rewriting the lines of the play understanding what was working and what was not working.

>>Well I imagine Lorca was similar when he read the newspaper and instead of reading only a news article, he read the world article around the news article and started to dream into the world of how dramatic events happen in real life.

>>How would that work?

>>Well I know in *Blood Wedding* he read a news article of this passion murder, a jealous stabbing, and he dreamed himself into the world of that event and then dreamed the world of that event into drama.

>>That makes sense, it also makes me think, I had a teacher very early on, David Wagner, poet playwright and novelist, who liked to say that early in the writing process he didn't want to make any decision about what form it might take whether it would be a poem, or the beginning of a play, or the ~~the~~ beginning of a novel and sometimes I think that's part of what we're trying to look at here. We give the students the tools to write poems and plays and ideally at the end we'll be writing a little of each, right?

>>Yes!

>>Onward!

>>[text on screen: This program was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S Department of State and by the University of Iowa.]

>>[logos on screen: American Flag, Department of State, University of Iowa]