Dr. Pam Peled | Enjoying Shakespeare

- Welcome back, everybody. It is my great pleasure to introduce another fellow South African professor, Pamela Peled, who is a lecturer and a journalist. After matriculating in South Africa, she studied English literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and did her PhD in Shakespeare at Bar Ilan University. She lectures on English literature, feminism, public speaking, and more at Beit Berl College and the Interdisciplinary Centre in Herzliya.

She is a regular columnist for the Jerusalem Post and Renaissance in London, and has lectured extensively in Israel and abroad, as well as on cruise ships. She has published three books on life and literature. Today Pamela introduced the works of Shakespeare through looking at a few words and phrases that have changed their meaning, and open up the text for modern audiences. Welcome, Pam. We are really looking forward to your presentation today, and I'm now going to hand over to you.

- Thank you, thank you, Wendy. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to talk, and thank you to Judy and to Shauna for all the help. I feel very happy and privileged to be part of this great group. The last few days I've been getting emails from all over the world, from cousins in Cape Town and Toronto and Brussels and London. So it's really a most spectacular way of everybody linking up. I'd like to just say that if anyone wants to ask any questions, then I'm happy to answer. Maybe you can just write them in the chat towards the end of the talk and then I'll gladly deal with them.

Okay, so tonight we are going to look at some of Shakespeare's sonnets, and before I look at the sonnets, I want to just talk about a few of the words that have changed their meaning since Shakespeare's time. Because if we understand the slang, then suddenly the text becomes so much clearer. So I'm just going to share the screen. And the first word that I'm going to talk about is the word "to die."

Text is displayed throughout the presentation.

So I wonder if anybody knows what the meaning of the word, what the slang meaning of the word "to die" was in Shakespeare's day. As I can't see you and I can't see if you're nodding or shaking your heads, I'm just going to tell you that "to die" was actually to have a lot of fun in bed. So "to die" was a slang way of saying to have good sex. Now, it's very important to know this, because in Shakespeare, a lot of the times the characters are saying to each other, I wish I could die for you, and if you help me kill my husband, I'll gladly die for you.

And if you don't know that slang, then you think, what an idiot. This woman's going to all the trouble of killing her husband, and after that, she's going to commit suicide? So it's very important to understand the background. What's the strange connection between having some fun and dying? So it comes from the French belief, the French phrase "la petit mort," the little death, and the French belief that every time you enjoyed yourself in the horizontal position, you

actually shortened your life by one minute.

So at this point, I usually stop the talk while people's eyes glaze over and they do their calculations, how much longer they got to live. And then, we continue. The next word, that I'm going to talk about is the word "nothing." So the word "nothing" also had a meaning that's lost today. And the word "nothing" actually meant anything to do with sex. Most of the words that I'm going to ask you have got something to do with sex. That's just what the slang was. "Nothing" could mean the act of having sex. It could mean the female sexual organs or the male, anything to do with it. So this is actually very important.

For example, in "Hamlet," in the play within the play, Hamlet comes to Ophelia and he says to her, "What are you thinking?" And she says, "I think nothing, my Lord." And Hamlet says to her, "That's a good thought to lie between a lady's legs." Now if you don't know, and at one point she says to him, "You are nothing. You are nothing." And you can think that Ophelia is saying to Hamlet, you're just a zero. You're You're not worth anything. But actually she's not. She's making a very different comment to him. It's very sort of gutter humour. T

hey're having a very racy conversation. And this is sometimes very serious because there's the play, of course, "Much Ado About Nothing," and "Much Ado About Nothing" tackles a very serious subject. It investigates whether you can trust women. And if you remember the play, it's all about whether the heroine of the play, the heroine of "Much Ado About Nothing" is confusingly called hero. And the play is about whether she is betraying her husband to be the night before the wedding. Is she a prostitute? Can you trust women? And of course, Shakespeare gives the most stunning feminist answer, that yes, you can trust women, indeed you can. And anyone who doesn't is an idiot himself.

So really the whole play "Much Ado About Nothing," is about whether you can trust women to be true to you, which is an interesting thing. One other little aside for the South Africans among us, you remember that when we were growing up in apartheid South Africa, everything was banned, of course. Everything political was banned, and all sex and violence was banned and the censors cut everything. But the South African censors, of course, didn't know Elizabethan slang. So they left all this most juicy text in, and our teacher used to explain it all to us. We were very happy about that. So that's the word "nothing."

The next word is the word "fond." "I'm fond of you." Now, I'm using this word as an example to show you that if you understand the meaning of the words, then you really can, just a slight understanding of some of the words changes the text 100%. Today, when we say I'm fond of you, obviously it means I like you, I like you very much. But in Shakespeare, in Elizabeth times, "fond" meant "I'm crazy." Even today, sometimes we say, "I'm mad about you," "I'm crazy about chocolate," right? The meaning has sort of remained. So, the meaning of "fond" meant "crazy." And if we know that for example, "King Lear," towards the middle of the play, when his daughters are driving him mad, he thinks he's losing his mind.

They've kicked him out of his own palace, they've taken his money, they've taken his power, they've taken his servants away, and King Lear looks at his daughter and he says, "I look at you with these fond old eyes." So if you don't know that "fond" means "crazy" you misunderstand the whole play and you think actually at this point, King Lear still loves his daughters, which of course he doesn't. He means "you're driving me mad." The next word is a word that's going to come up in our sonnet, and that's why I'm mentioning it here. And the word is "spirits." "Spirits" actually on the one hand meant spirits and spirituality.

But on the other hand, it was Elizabethan slang for the ejaculate. Now, the only reason that it's important to know that is that the characters in the play, for example, King Lear's daughter, says to Edmond, again, "if you help me to dispose of my husband we'll really have fun and let your spirits fly." And what does she mean by this? She doesn't mean we are going to go to heaven together, okay? She's making a very direct come on to him and telling him, kill my husband and you can have me instead. So that's another word that's worth understanding. And the last word I want to look at is the word "bark." So "bark" had the meanings that it's got today, the bark of a tree and to bark. But it also had two other meanings.

One of the meanings was a ship. And a ship was made out of wood. So that's easy to understand, but still a further meaning of the word "bark" was your soul. Now again, this is also interesting. For example, in "Macbeth," when the witches say about a sailor, "Though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest tossed," They're not talking only about the ship of the sailor, they're talking about his soul. And when we come on, they're actually talking about Macbeth and not a sailor at all. And it shows us that the witches say, we can't actually kill anybody. We can't actually take their soul.

But what we can do is give them such a terrible time that they wish they were dead. "Though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest tossed," meaning his soul. So, those are the words that I wanted to show you. And many of them come up in the sonnets that we're going to look at now this evening. So the sonnets I'm going to show you here, the sonnets. In Shakespeare's day, if you were a poet of worth, you had to write a sonnet. Today you can write in free verse, you can write "Sitting on the beach, thinking of you," and you can say that that's a poem. It's not a great poem, but you can write whatever you like.

But when Shakespeare was writing, poets had to write sonnets. And this is something very personal to me, and I'll tell you why. When I married my late husband, Martin, who came from London, my beautiful, wonderful husband, although he was perfect in every way, he didn't know anything about Shakespeare, which was very strange to me because after all, he'd grown up in London. And so I started to teach him. And we used to go to the beach with "Macbeth" and we used to go on holiday with "King Lear" and he really grew to love Shakespeare. And so I used to say when he was alive that I was probably the only woman in Israel and maybe the only woman in the world that every birthday and every anniversary, my husband used to write me a sonnet. And he used to stick to the rules of the sonnets, which I'll show you now.

The first rule was that a sonnet has to be written in 14 lines, no more, no less, exactly 14 lines. And the second rule of a sonnet is the rhyme scheme has to be A, B, A, B, C, D, C, D, E, F, E, F, G, G. What does that mean? When you come to the end of the first line of the poem, of the sonnet, "something, something, something you," you call that A, and then you look at the second line and it ends with "me" and you say, does me rhyme with you? No, so you call it the next letter of the alphabet, B. And then you look at the third line and you see it's "too". And you say, have we had that rhyme before? Have we had that sound?

Yes, "you," what letter was that? A, so we call it A, and then we get the next one, "free." And we say, have we had "free," "me," So you can see A, B, A, B, you, me, too free. And then you get the next word "way." And you haven't had that sound before, so you call it C, et cetera. And so the rhyme scheme of the sonnet has to be A, B, A, B, C, D, C, D, E, F, E, F, G, G. So Martin used to write me sonnets in 14 lines, I love you, da, da, da, even though your eyes are not blue, da da da da, perfect, perfect sonnets. But I always used to say that much as I adored and admired my husband, when I die, the sonnets will die with me.

What's the difference between Martin's sonnets and Shakespeare? And the answer is iambic pentameter. He thought he could do iambic pentameter. He could more or less, but not perfectly. What's iambic pentameter? iambic pentameter iambic pentameter is the beat, the beat of the rhythm of the sonnet. And Shakespearean sonnets had a very definite rhythm. I'll show you what I mean. In every language, in every word, there are unstressed syllables, that I hope you can see it, that is the phonetic symbol for an unstressed syllable. And that's for a stressed syllable. So we say hell-O, we can't say HELLo. We have to say TA-ble.

We can't say put it on the ta-BLE, right? In every language, we say shul-CHAN. We can't say put it on the SHUL-chan. There's a stressed syllable and an unstressed syllable and they're always very, very constant. So iambic beat is unstressed, stressed. Behold. DA, da. Unstressed, stressed, DA, da. There's other kind of stresses. The next one is the opposite, trochaic. TI-ger. You have to say TI-ger, you can't say "I saw a ti-GER," right? And then there's dactylic, which is DA, da da. And DESperate, DA, da, da. And then there's anapestic.

Understand, da, da, DA. So iambic stress is DA, da. And iambic pentameter, pentameter being five. iambic pentameter is when you have this, the iambic foot repeated five times. da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA. That's the beat, and it sounds like a heartbeat or it's the beat when you're walking. da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA. It's very natural, it's very easy to learn of by heart, it's very easy to declaim. da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA. Now, if I ask you what's the most, most famous line in Shakespeare? Really, 99.999% of the times or even more than that, people will say, "To be or not to be, that is the question."

Everybody knows that. And you can hear that that's in iambic pentameter. "To be or not to be, that is the question." But if I say that line to you, "To be or not to be, that is the question," you can hear that something is wrong, right? "To be or not to be, that is the question." It doesn't sound right. What's wrong? You can hear that in the fourth foot, we don't say "To be or not to be,

that IS the question." We say, "to be or not to be, THAT is the question." In the fourth foot, he's inverted the iamb. It's stressed, unstressed, "To be or not to be, THAT is the question." And some people say that that was such an unusual thing to do that that's the reason that this is the line that everybody remembered. It did something to the rhythm in our bodies. We said that's an unusual line. Whether or not that's the case, I don't know.

But everybody says that "to be or not to be" is the most famous line. Okay, so that's the rhythm. Da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA. And I'll just show you one of the sonnets that we're going to be looking at now is Sonnet 130. And this is the line. "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." Look at the iambic pentameter. Da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA. "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." Now obviously when we speak this line, we don't say, "my MISstress' EYES are NO-thing LIKE the SUN." We say "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." But you can hear that if you analyse the beat, that will be the beat.

Okay, so now we come to, look, Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets. All of them were 14 lines except for one that was 10 lines. And there's a reason why that sonnet was 10 lines. There's a thematic reason, but all the others were 14 lines in iambic pentameter with this regular rhyme scheme, A, B, A, B, C, D, C, D, E, F, E, F, G, G. Now we don't know much about Shakespeare's personal life. And so we don't know whether he was writing about himself in the sonnets or not. Let me stop sharing. That's what everybody until today is absolutely fascinated about. What was Shakespeare's personal life? And the answer is we just don't know. We know a few facts about him. We know that he was born in 1564 and he died in 1616, on his birthday, some people say. So, that we definitely know.

And we know that when he was 18, he got married to Anne Hathaway who was 26. She was eight years older than him. And she was also six months pregnant when they got married, which was quite unusual in those days when dating couples had to be with a chaperone all the time. Anyway, they had a child. And then two years later they have twins, Judith and Hamnet, their first child was Susanna. So when they had three children, Shakespeare went to London. And there are all kinds of stories about why he went. Lots of them are are not true. We don't know the truth, we just know that he was in London for 30 years.

He wrote 37 plays when he was there and some poems and 154 sonnets. And then he came back to Stratford for two years at the end of his life where he died, that's it. We really know nothing else, but there's lots of legends. Everybody's obsessed with was he a homosexual, was he a bisexual, was he a heterosexual? Did he have lovers? Who were his lovers? What did he do when he was in London when he wasn't writing plays? And the truth is we'd just know nothing. There's lots of conjecture, but. So when we look at the sonnets, it's very tempting to say that he was writing about his own experience at the time, and we like to do that, but we are not sure at all.

We do know that when he got to London, he met a man called Henry Wriothesley who was the earl of Southampton, a very, very beautiful young man. And this man became Shakespeare's

patron and he used to pay him to write poems and to write plays. And Henry Wriothesley didn't want to get married, and everybody was completely frantic because he owned a lot of property. And what do you do if you don't get married and you don't have a son, an heir? Who does the property go to? And the people from the church and the nobility and everybody was telling him, get married, get married, get married. And someone came to Shakespeare and said, please, he likes you, write him poems urging him to get married. So the first 17 sonnets are about how important it is to find a wife, get married and have children. And one of the more beautiful ones says, "What will you do when 40 winters have stamped wrinkles into your brow?"

You're 40 years old and you've wrinkled. 40 was very old in those days. Life expectancy was something like 36 or something. You're 40 years old, you don't have a child. How selfish is that? And then in Sonnet 18 that we are going to look at in a few minutes, it seems as though Shakespeare fell in love with Henry Wriothesley, and never again does he tell him to get married and have children. Okay, so I'm going to start off with a beautiful sonnet. I'll show it to you. A sonnet in praise of true love. When you've got true love, nothing else matters. Okay, Sonnet 116, and Shakespeare says, oh, first of all, I'll just show you the rhyme scheme.

Minds, finds, love, remove, whatever doesn't sound to us as though it rhymes, rest assured that 400 years ago it did rhyme, it was love and remove or whatever, mark, bark, shaken, taken, cheeks, weeks, come and doom used to rhyme, and proved and love, which also used to rhyme. Okay, so Shakespeare says, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." And you can very easily hear that there's no iambic pentameter here, it's not "da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA, da DA." It's DA, DA, DA, DA, DA. And whenever he deviates from the standard, we know that there's a reason. And the reason here is that he's being very didactic.

He's telling us a fact. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." Please notice all the Ns and Ms. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments," okay? You can hear what a weighted line this is. And what is Shakespeare saying? If you've got the marriage of true minds, real communication based on understanding each other and talking to each other, nothing can go wrong with that love. And then he says, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." Notice the beautiful repetition. Love, love, alters, alteration, remover, remove. What does he mean by this?

If when you alter, if when you become grey and wrinkled and fatter, and cellulite, and your love doesn't love you anymore because you've physically changed, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." It was never love to begin with. If it's based on physical attraction, it's not good. "Or bends with the remover to remove." If somebody comes, prettier than you or more handsome or richer, and removes your love, it wasn't love to begin with. "Oh no!" That's the beauty of Shakespeare. He gives you this sort of highfalutin concept and then he punches you in the stomach. "O no! it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken." What does that mean? Please notice also the internal rhyme, ever, tempest, never. So it's not enough that he does the end of line rhyme.

There's also all this internal language makes the poetry sing. "O no! It is an ever-fixed mark" Love, proper love, love based on the marriage of true minds is like a lighthouse. It looks on tempests. Obviously there's going to be drama in your love, obviously there's going to be hard times, but if you've got true love, it will be like a lighthouse, watching the tempests but never shaken. "It is the star to every wandering bark." Ar, ar, ar. Star, wandering, bark. In those days, of course, sailors sailed by the light, they took their direction by the stars. And I told you that "bark" meant a ship, but also it means your soul.

So if you are lucky enough to have true love, love will always guide you home. "It is the star to every wandering bark Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken." In those days, nobody knew what the worth of a star was. They didn't know what it was comprised of, but they knew there it is, and we can steer ourselves home. And that's the same as love. You can't say that love is A, B, C, you can't define it exactly in scientific terms, but if you've got it, it'll keep you safe and bring you home. "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come." I'll just stop sharing here. The Elizabethans were obsessed with the theory of mutability. They were obsessed with growing older, they grew old so quickly, and they were obsessed with only looking young and beautiful for such a short time. So he says that love is not Time's fool.

There was this image of old Father Time in his long cloak with his sickle cutting down your youth, cutting down your beauty. And Shakespeare says that love can't be cut down. "Rosy lips and cheeks come within the compass of his bending sickle." Time will change your rosy lips and cheeks, but not your love. "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come: Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom." If you've got true love, it'll last 'til you die, 'til the edge of doom. And then he says, "If this be error and upon me proved," maybe I'm wrong and you prove that I'm wrong, "I never writ," notice again, the eh, eh, eh, eh, and eh, eh. "If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved." What does he mean by this?

He says, maybe I'm wrong and you're going to prove that I'm wrong. If that's the case, I've never written. So it's obviously not the case. We're reading his writing, so he must be right. Yes, but you can say you've written, but you've written rubbish. I don't agree with what you've written. But then he says, "nor no man ever loved." If I'm wrong, you have never known true love. Nobody's known true love and nobody's going to admit that they haven't known true love ever in their life. And so people say, okay, Shakespeare, you're right. And this is one of the things that he loved to do, that to prove that he was the best writer and the cleverest man and always correct. So I'm going to read the sonnet again without stopping. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments.

Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove. O no! it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wandering bark, Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. Love's not Time's fool,

though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come; Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks; But bears it out even to the edge of doom. If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved." So I think that's a most beautiful sonnet. And the next one, you can never say anything about Shakespeare's opinions. For example, it's too big a subject to go into, but was Shakespeare an antisemite or was he not an antisemite? So in the same play you can find proof that yes, he was an antisemite, or no, he thought that antisemites were cruel and stupid people.

Did he love women or was he a feminist or was he anti-women? And in the same play you can prove he thought women were great and he thought women were terrible. You never know what Shakespeare's really thinking because we can co-opt him. He's such a cultural icon that everybody co-opts him for their own agenda, and it's easy to do that. And that's what makes Shakespeare so great. And the same with the sonnets. So you can say, wow, he's really, he gives these great compliments to love. But look at the next sonnet, the next sonnet was one thing that we are not sure about, but it's the legend, is that Shakespeare at some point met the Dark Lady of the sonnets. Now who is the Dark Lady of the sonnets?

That's a mystery. One of the possibilities is that she was Amelia del Bassano who was actually a Jewish woman, a Marrano from Italy who was in the court of Elizabeth. And he very probably would've met her. And there's a lot of evidence, which I haven't got time to talk about tonight, but there's a lot of evidence that she was actually his lover and she was Jewish. So I'll just tell you that once I was in Brussels, giving this lecture to a group of British women, expats, their husbands were diplomats mostly, and they were in Brussels. And I was telling them that there's a lot of evidence that Shakespeare's lover was Jewish. And they kind of looked, and then I said, "and the Shakespeare scholars and the people who love Shakespeare in Israel and now working very hard to prove that actually Shakespeare himself was Jewish."

And I was met by this wall of stony silence. And afterwards at the break, one of the women came up to me and she said, "What did you mean when you said that you are working in Israel to prove that Shakespeare was Jewish?" So I said, "I was joking, I was joking." So she said "It wasn't at all funny." So that's my memory of talking about whether Shakespeare was Jewish. Anyway, he did meet some sort of Dark Lady, if we believe the sonnets are about him, and he had this tempestuous relationship. He loved her and hated her, and she made his life wonderful and terrible. And at some point it seems as though he introduced the Dark Lady to the earl of Southampton. And it seemed as though they started having an affair as well. So it was all very, very complicated, we can say. And at this point, Shakespeare wrote another sonnet, just fed up with the whole business of love and sex.

So you can see, what did you really think about it? Two different things. Here. The next sonnet is sonnet number 129. And you can see again, shame, blame, lust, trust, straight, et cetera. And he says, you can see he's angry about relationships. He says, "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," the act of having sex, right, "spirit," I told you what it meant. So sex is a waste of shame, and what is it? It's "lust in action, and till action, lust." There's very little marriage of true

minds here and love that lasts forever; it's just lust. "Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust."

So if you look at those words, you can hear "perjured," there's lots of "ur" sounds and plosives, buh, buh. "Not to trust," tuh, tuh, tuh, right? Plosive sounds and lots of oohs and uhs, obviously memetic of the act of having sex. So this poem is about sex and how terrible it is. "Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust, Enjoyed no sooner." So he gives it to you that it's enjoyed, but as soon as it's over, "despised straight." The minute it's finished, you hate yourself. "Past reason hunted; and no sooner had; Past reason hated," You can see the repetition. It's almost the same line.

Past reason hunted, past reason hated. When you want sex, you just insanely hunt it. And when you've had it, you insanely hate it. It's like "as a swallowed bait, "On purpose laid to make the taker mad." You can hear the "ay, ay, ay" sounds, it's like spitting it out like a revolver, like a gun. "ah, ah, ah, ah," He's so angry about it. Oops. "On purpose laid to make the taker mad," okay? "Mad in pursuit and in possession so;" The whole process, you are insane. While you are looking for it, while you are having it, you're mad. "Had, having, and in quest to have extreme; A bliss in proof," in proof means while you are involved in it, okay?

While you are having sex, it's wonderful, "A bliss in proof, and proved," the minute it's over, what have I done? "a very woe," what's he talking about here? We can only hope that he's talking about some sort of illicit sex, extramarital sex or sex that's banned, something very unnatural, because it would be a terrible thing if this is what Shakespeare was sort of passing down to the ages that sex is every time you get into bed with your husband or wife, you have to go through this extreme woe. That wouldn't be so good. But he says, "A bliss in proof and proved, a very woe; Before, a joy proposed; behind a dream. All this the world well knows."

Notice the alliterations. Wuh, wuh, "All this the world well knows, Yet none knows well," nuh, nuh, wuh." Okay, the Ws and the Ns, "All this the world well knows; Yet none knows well To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell." Okay, you can notice the internal rhymes that makes the sonnet, again, sing. "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell." That's a pretty powerful sonnet and a pretty sad sonnet. So who knows what he was going through at that particular point in his life.

The next sonnet that I'm going to look at is one of the more famous, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day." It's sonnet number 18. It actually happens to be on the Matric syllabus in Israel, the Bagrut syllabus, or it was for many, many years. But what's less well known is that this sonnet was doing a number of things. It's a beautiful love sonnet. But as well as that, Shakespeare is debunking the other poets of the day. Because in Shakespeare's time, poets used to use what they called conceits. And a conceit was comparing a part of your love to something like, your hair is like silk, or, you know the joke, your teeth are like stars, they come out at night.

Those sort of things, your cheeks are like roses and whatever. So that's what the poets were writing in Shakespeare's time. And he was sick of it. And he came along with the sonnet that says, sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? So I'll tell you a few things about this sonnet. It comes after 17 sonnets where he tells the Earl of Southampton, get married, get married, have a child. And now in sonnet 18, he seems to be falling in love with the Earl of Southampton. And he never again tells him to get married.

From now on, he just says how he loves him and how this guy makes him so happy and also makes him so crazy when he goes off on trips and he goes with other people. So let's look at this beautiful, again, day, may, temperate day, shines, declines, the same rhyme scheme, and the same iambic pentameter. So he starts off by saying, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day" like the other poets used to do, and then he says, of course not. How can I compare you to a summers day? "Thou art more lovely and more temperate."

You're much better than a summer's day. And remember, it was a summer's day in England, so they weren't that great. The word temperate is a beautifully interesting word. In Shakespeare's day, they believed, they really believed this as a scientific fact, that the body was composed of four tempers. And let's just get them right. They corresponded to earth, fire, air, and water. And the tempers were blood, phlegm, choler and melancholic, and these were liquids that sloshed around in your body, keeping you in a good temper.

You had the right balance of these liquids in your body. And until today we say he's got a good temper, or he's got a bad temper. It's a word that's remained. So he says that you are more lovely and you're more balanced than a summer's day. And then he starts to say all the bad things that happen in summer. "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May." Isn't that a beautiful line? The darling buds, the little baby buds of the May tree that blooms in May. This is something wrong.

You are perfect, and look at all the things that go wrong with a summer's day. "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease have all too short a date." Summer is too short, as again, he wasn't writing about Israel, that's for sure. And he was writing way before global warming. So this is another downfall of summer, it's too short. "Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines." Look at the internal rhyme. Time, I, I. I, I, I. And the alliteration, huh, huh. Hot, heaven. And every line has got internal rhyme and alliteration and other rhetorical beautiful features.

Sometimes it's too hot. "Some time too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimm'd." Sometimes it's cloudy and it's not hot enough. "And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd." What does that mean? I told you that the Elizabethans were obsessed with losing their beauty and dying. They died, it was very hard to get to old age or even to maturity in Elizabethan times. There were plagues and there were fires and there was poverty and there was sickness.

And there was no medicine. It was very hard to live. And they were all obsessed with the speed at which people grew old. So Shakespeare says everything that's beautiful, "every fair from fair," everything that's beautiful leaves its beauty, is taken away from its beauty at some time. "Some time declines." How? Either by chance, if you've got a beautiful flower and someone by chance comes by and picks it, that's just by chance, the beauty will fade. But even if no one picks it, "by nature's changing course untrimm'd," the theory of mutability will catch up with you in the end. Because even if that flower blossoms in the best conditions, it will be beautiful for a day, two days, a week, and then it will wilt and die because that's the course of nature.

And no one can trim, no one can cut the course of nature. And the same with people. Every beautiful person from that beauty sometimes declines. May we all live to 120 happily and safely and beautifully, but at some point we will get old and withered. But, more horribly, sometimes chance cuts people off in their prime. So one way or the other, it's going to happen. "And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd. But thy eternal summer shall not fade." Now he turns to his love who might be the Earl of Southampton, but who knows? And he says, but you will be... Everybody else will die.

Everybody else will lose their beauty, but not you. "Thy eternal summer shall not fade Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st." You own your beauty and you will never lose it. "Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade." That comes from "Tehilim," from the Psalms of David, "though I wander in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." And he says, you will never die. "Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade." Why not? Why will every other person on the planet die, but not you, my love?

Because "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st," you won't die because you will be always remembered in lines that I have written that will live forever, he says. "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this," this sonnet, "and this gives life to thee." Now I'm sure you'll agree that that's the most monumental bit of chutzpah ever written in any language. He says, "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see," so long lives this, my work will last as long as there are people in the world. "So long as men can breathe and eyes can see So long lives this," this sonnet and my work in general, "and this gives life to thee."

And he's right, isn't he? We still here in summer and in London and in all over the world reading Shakespeare sonnets. So, so far he's right. What's he doing in this sonnet? He's, first of all, debunking the poets of the age and saying, what idiots are you to compare your love to a summers day? Did I tell you that I think there's a direct line between Shakespeare and Monty Python? You could never say that again, "My love is like a summer's day."

He had ruined that forever. The second thing he's doing is saying, you are a wonderful person and I love you so much, you are just perfect. And the third thing he's doing is saying, I'm the best, I'm the best writer in the whole wide world. I just want to say something that people are writing me stuff in the chats. I've got lots of comments, but I'll look at them at the end because I can't multitask like that. I'm just not good enough to talk and read at the same time. So now I'm

just going to, I'm going to refer to the comments later. I've just got one more sonnet that I want to do with you, and that is this one. "My mistress' eyes."

So here again, he's really giving hell to the other poets who were comparing their mistress's eyes to the sun. And he says, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." What are you talking about, you idiots? "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. Coral is far more red, than her lips red." Again, they were saying that their love's lips were like coral. "Coral is far more red, than her lips red. If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun." Okay, he's going a bit from the sublime to the ridiculous. Her breasts were obviously not white, but dun.

Dun is the colour of dirty dishwater. But we have to remember that in Shakespeare's time, there was really absolutely no hygiene. People never washed. Queen Elizabeth used to insist, come hell or high water, that she would bath once a year. Hygiene was just too terrible for words. In order to make their hair blonde, they used to pour urine on their hair, and they had these fancy hairdos that they used to, you remember, over these kind of cages, and mice used to nest in those cages and sometimes even little birds or snakes.

There was no hygiene. They used to put chalk, white chalk sort of on their faces, which had lead based. And women were always swooning. Their corsets were too tight. They were putting drops in their eyes called belladonna, beautiful pretty eyes. But they used to make them nauseous and sometimes made them die. So, in the quest to be beautiful, women got really sick. So I'll just go back to the sonnet. So definitely nobody's skin was white, but so dirty. "If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head." Okay, he's exaggerating here for effect. "I have seen roses, damasked, red and white." I've seen two toned roses, red and white, "But no such roses see I in her cheeks." Again, he's sort of mocking the other poets for saying her cheeks are like roses. "And in some perfumes is there more delight Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks."

That's a very strong word to say her breath stinks. But unfortunately there was definitely no oral hygiene, nothing. And so breath probably did reek. A very interesting thing to remember is that in those days, only the very rich could afford sugar and it was imported, and they used to eat sugar and then not brush their teeth. So rich people used to have rotten teeth, black, black, rotten teeth from sugar. So having black rotten teeth became a status symbol because it showed that you could afford sugar and the poor people didn't like having white clean teeth. So they used to go and find coal dust, and rub a piece of coal on their teeth so that they also could have blackened teeth.

I often think of that when I watch the CNN anchor women with their teeth so shiny that you have to put sunglasses on to watch them. If they were a few hundred years ago, their teeth would be black. So he says, "And in some perfumes is there more delight Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks." And then come the beautiful lines. "I love to hear her speak, yet well I know That music hath a far more pleasing sound." He says, I love to hear her speak. Other poets said her voice is like soft music. He says, I love to hear her speak, but not because of the gentle

tinkling timbre of her voice. I love to hear her speak because I love to hear what she has to say because we have the marriage of true minds. We communicate, I listen to her, I don't care what her voice sounds like. "I love to hear her speak, yet well I know That music hath a far more pleasing sound." And then he spits out these next lines at the stupid poets who call their women a goddess.

He says, "I grant I never saw a goddess go My mistress when she walks, treads on the ground." She's a flesh and blood woman, okay? And look at the Gs, he's really spitting at them. "I grant I never saw a goddess go My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground." And then he says, "And yet by heaven I think my love as rare." And by God I think my love is as fabulous as any of yours who you lie about with false comparison. "And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare As any she belied with false compare." Now I think I'll just read the sonnet over so that you can hear what it sounds like without interruptions. "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.

Coral is far more red, than her lips red: If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun. If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. I have seen roses damasked, red and white, But no such roses see I in her cheeks; And in some perfumes is there more delight Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. I love to hear her speak, yet well I know That music hath a far more pleasing sound. I grant I never saw a goddess go My mistress when she walks, treads on the ground: And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare As any she belied with false compare." Again, he's doing a few things in the sonnet. First of all, he's debunking the poets of the day. And second of all, he's showing how much he loves this woman.

He calls her all the time, "my mistress." "My mistress." And "I love to hear her speak" and she's as fantastic as any of the women that you lie about with false comparisons. So that's the four sonnets that I wanted to do with you this evening. And it's more or less the end of the hour. But I'm really happy to answer as many questions as you'd like to ask me. I can look at the chat or I can hand over to Wendy and you can choose the questions you want me to answer. Thank you.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Thank you very much, Pam. That was fantastic. Took me back to my university days where I actually did English three and I was lucky enough to have fantastic professors. So thank you very, very much. The the first question is, Shakespeare is so deep and multifaceted. How much of this wealth of detail did the ordinary person understand?

A: Yeah, that's a good question. Obviously they understood the slang, because it was the slang of their time. The short answer to that is that Shakespeare catered to everyone in the community. It wasn't like today when only the educated people actually go and see Shakespeare because people don't understand him. And there's such a wealth of different entertainment, not during the pandemic times, but usually you can go to so many different things. But in Shakespeare's day there was the theatre and that was pretty much all, there was nothing else to do. There was no television.

So he catered to the upper society and the lowest, the kings and the queens came to the same performance as the poorest people. So he pitched his language and his ideas to everybody. I'll just give you one tiny example. In "Macbeth," when Macbeth kills the king, afterwards he says, "Will this my hand ever be clean? No, rather will the multitudinous seas my hand incarnadine." What the hell does that mean? "The multitudinous seas my hand incarnadine."

That was for the very educated kings and queen. And then he says, "making the green one red." So if you don't know the word incarnadine, you do know the word red and you realise that the sea will turn red from my hand. So the average person would understand the slang, but different people would get different things from from his work for sure.

Q: Thank you. A second question. What do you think of Helen Mirren saying that Shakespeare should not be taught in school via books? I dunno if you can hear my grandfather clock that my parents brought from South Africa. I think it might have even come from Lithuania, and it's chiming ten. So I only heard that, what Helen Mirren, one more time?

- Should we wait for the clock to finish chiming?

- Can you hear it? It's finished. What do I think about Helen Mirren?

- Saying that Shakespeare should not be taught in school via books? It's a question that I'm repeating, I'm not,

- I'm very loath to...

- Onto the question, so,

A: Helen Mirren, who am I to disagree with her? But I must say, I think that's a crazy thing to say. Why not? It depends how,

- Maybe we should reach out to Helen Mirren and get the answer from her and then we can report back. I think that's a better way to go.

- Put me on a panel with her.

Q: Exactly. How did the meaning of these words change over time?

A: I dunno, how do slang words change over time? When did bread, do we still, when we were growing up you said, have you got any bread? And that was money. Do people still say that today? I think slang just changes over time.

Q: Yeah, it does, and it's generational, I think. How do you know his pronunciations, as London

pronunciations differ from outside London?

A: I definitely don't know his pronunciations, but I can be sort of sure that in those days if he was so carefully sticking to the rhyme scheme, I don't know if it's "luhv" and "pruhv" or "loove" and "proove" I don't know the pronunciations, I just know that however they were pronounced, they rhymed.

Q: Okay, thank you. So the fifth question is, have you read the book "Hamnet" by Maggie O'Farrell? And did you like it?

A: I have read it, I've just read it. I'm always loath to say that I don't like a book when lots of people like it because it sounds so snobbish. It's in my book club, and it's actually the book that we're going to be discussing next month in my book club. I didn't like it is the answer, true answer, because I think that it's so based on not known facts, and people who read a book like that and it's Shakespeare, will think that this is what happened, and there's absolutely no, it's groundless facts. And I also didn't think it was so beautifully written. I just, I don't want to say more about that book. I didn't so much like it.

Q: It didn't appeal to you, okay. And then the last question is, Shakespeare has a genius for addressing death without depressing one. Can you comment?

A: I'm not sure that he doesn't depress. I'm really not sure. I think it's pretty depressing when Romeo and Juliet do themselves in, and I think it's quite depressing when Cordelia is hung and Desdemona is murdered. But I do think I understand the question because it seems to me that at the end of great trauma, usually there's a light at the end of the tunnel. So when Romeo and Juliet die, the last scene is that through their death, they're going to cause a reconciliation between the families. And when Desdemona dies, all the bad guys also die.

He never leaves us with the feeling that evil has won. Even though the good guys in "Hamlet," for example, are all dead, the bad guys are also dead. He never leaves us with the feeling that life is desperate. I don't know if any of you know the Polanski movie, "Macbeth" Ends with Macbeth the tyrant dead. I don't want to talk about modern politics, but it's very hard not to. But so Macbeth is, the country is at last liberated from this man who's bringing Scotland down. And we are left with a good feeling that the new ruler will be, Duncan's son will be a good king. But in the Polanski movie, which is more modern, we get Malcolm is the king.

And Donalbain, the brother, is coming back to Scotland. And the inference and the reference is clear that he's coming back to start another war. So Shakespeare leaves us happy, but Polanski says, that's never happy, endings are never good. And he twists the ending. So it's all in the way it's interpreted. It can be interpreted either way. But he normally, if we just look at the text, it's normally there's a glimmer of hope at the end.

- Well, I must say that I always like to leave everything on a positive note and on a hopeful note.

So I just want to say thank you very, very much for this very informative, insightful presentation. I'm a great Shakespeare fan myself, and I've always found him absolutely genius, and it was a pleasure to have you with us for the past hour. So thank you very, very much.

- Thank you, Wendy. I really thank you, I appreciate it so much. I was very, very happy and privileged to speak in this forum, it was great for me.

- It's a great pleasure. And to all our participants and to all your family, to your cousins all over the world and to all our participants all over the world, I wanted to say thank you very much for joining us. And on that note, goodnight to all the Israelis and the South Africans and the Europeans. And to the Americans, enjoy the rest of your day.

- Can I say one last thing? I see that there's so many questions that I didn't get to, and if anyone wants to go to the Facebook or message me or email me, I'm happy to answer any more questions if you want.

- Do you want to share your email now?

- Yeah, sure. My email is peledpam, like in one word, @gmail.com. Or you can just go to my Facebook and write me the question and I'll answer.

- And if anybody did not get that, Judy will send out your... We'll be happy to send out your details if you agree to that. Thank you very, very much.

- Thank you.

- [Wendy] Bye, everyone, bye.

- Bye.