

Trudy Gold | Exotic Mistresses: Diane de Poitiers

- We are getting to that period of French history that is so beloved of television programmes, films, and of course, the latest television epic, "The Crown", has got nothing on the stories that I'm about to tell about the kings of France. This week I'm going to be talking about Henry II and his mistress, and of course, he was married to Catherine de' Medici, whose doctor and astrologer was Nostradamus. So I think we're getting into a very exciting period of history. And next week, I'm going to be talking about the women of Louis XIV. Because in a way, we felt that we've been dealing an awful lot with the darkness. Now let's deal a little bit with the, I don't know, how would you describe it? You are looking at a period of history that is extraordinarily intricate. And the reason there isn't much Jewish history at this period is there were very, very few Jews living in France. In fact, there is only one person of Jewish descent that I'll be talking about today, and some of you might, in fact, know who it is. Now, can we have a look at the picture of Diane de Poitiers, please. This is Diane de Poitiers. She was meant to be one of the most beautiful women of her era, and in fact, she became the mistress of Henry, the future Henry II of France, when he was 15 years old and she was 41. And she kept him by her side, until he died, aged 40. So she's an extraordinary woman. But the backdrop to her story, look at the period in which she lived. We are going to be talking about really the rise of absolute monarchy, the consolidation of the state. Who's king of England at the time? It's Henry VII, the Tudors, it's going to be Henry VII, Henry VIII, and of course later on, Henry VIII's children, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth. And Elizabeth is going to cross swords with Henry II's wife, Catherine de' Medici, those two formidable women. Whereas over in the upcoming Muslim Empire, you have another incredible woman, Roxelana. So it's also the backdrop to the terrible wars of religion. And in order to understand this, I'm sure many of you thought about this, what was the great change in the 1400s, 1500s, 1600s? And of course, it's the Renaissance, it's the growth of humanism and the age of discovery. This is the period, of course, of the exploitation of the Americas. And we're going to see how the major families, the British, the Spanish, the French, and the Habsburgs on the mainland are all going to intermarry. And it's also the beginning of the age of mercantilism. But the other important issue, which we never can forget, the invention of the printing press, which led to a rediscovery of knowledge. And it also led to a huge divide in the Christian world, the rise of Protestantism. In 1519, Martin Luther nails his 95 Theses to a church door at Wittenberg, proclaiming the Protestant Revolution. And we're going to see how Protestantism is going to take root in France, in England. And of course, it's going to be fought, unbelievably fiercely, by the papacy, and by the two arms of the papacy, the Habsburg of Spain and the Habsburgs of Austria. Never forget that when Philip II, who's going to come into this story, when he launched his crusade against England, the Spanish Armada in

1588, it actually was a crusade against a heretic who had murdered a queen. So that's by way of a backdrop. It's also a time of the glory of the Renaissance in art, in architecture, the development of music, the development of the ballet. And Patrick is going to be talking about this. So we're trying very hard to coincide our lectures. And those of you who were disappointed that Patrick wasn't online, we fixed it so that he will be speaking on Monday, he'll be speaking on Sunday, and then again on Monday evening, so we keep the programme in together. So let's talk first about Diane de Poitiers. She came from the lesser French nobility. She was briefly in the retinue of the King Charles VIII's sister, who skillfully held the regency down in his minority.

Now she had a very good education. When we talk about women in power, the only real power women had, be they mistresses or the heirs to great estates, was actually through men. And that's one of the reasons that many of the powerful women we talk about have had to use their sexuality to, in fact, take control. And when women do rule, like Catherine de' Medici, she's called a witch, she's called the Italian serpent, she's called a sorcerer. And in fact, she was really a very skillful politician. But can a woman be anything but alluring? But we know that Diane had an incredibly good education. She's educated in Renaissance humanism. She knew Greek, she knew Latin, of course, etiquette, which is becoming so important at the French court. But she'd also had a great love of architecture, which she'd studied, and very unusual, she was well versed in law and in finance. Like many young women from the lesser nobility, remember, she's very beautiful, but she's going to be a pawn in a game. And 1515, when she's 15 years old, not unusual for the time, she's married to a man who is 39 years her senior, who himself was the illegitimate grandson of a king, and a courtier to the king, who she's going to serve under, Francis I, the father of her lover, Henry II. So she's married to a man who is 39 years older than her, and she produces two daughters by him. Shortly after her marriage, like she's now gone up, she's now moved up the social scale, she becomes lady-in-waiting to Queen Claude of France. Can we see Queen Claude of France, please? Oh, sorry. First of all, Francis I. That is the King of France, who is going to be the King through her period of really relationship with her lover, who was his second son. That's Francis I of France. He is a very, very powerful, strong ruler, one of the most powerful of the kings, of the French rulers, who runs concurrently with Henry VII and Henry VIII of England. And those of you who love English history will know that it's in 1520, we have the extraordinary Field of the Cloth of Gold, where the two young monarchs, look at the way he's dressed, look at all the gold, look at all the ornaments, they are going to come together and create the most incredibly luxurious period that lasts a week, where they entertain their courts in France. And it's important to remember, and later on, in 300 years, it is really, really going to cause problems, because of course, we are dealing with kings who see themselves as completely absolutist. They rule by divine right. And

one of the issues, they are humanists, they are creatures of the Renaissance, but we don't yet think about equality. We don't think about the majority of the people, who are peasantry and living most accursed lives. The power of the Church is what motivated them. I don't know if you've ever considered, I mean, I remember the first time I went to Chartres, in France, that huge cathedral which completely dominates the landscape, the power of the Church, the power of the king, and of course, the peasantry living mean, miserable lives, just existing really, but against the extraordinary luxury of the court. And it's really going to explode in the 1600/1700s, when the kings need to really create more merchants to create a sound middle class. And the minute you educate, it's all going to blow. But at this stage, you're looking at kings who believe they have the divine right to rule. They are God's anointed on earth. And it's really going to come to the fore later on in the reign of Louis XIV, the longest-reigning European monarch ever, 72 years and 100 days, but that's for next week. So, going back to Diane de Poitiers, she comes to the court of Francis I. Francis I loved to surround himself with beautiful women. And she becomes a lady-in-waiting to Queen Claude. Can we see Queen Claude's picture? That is Queen Claude of France. She died aged 24; or, she died aged 25. She was first cousin to her husband, Francis I. Why did he marry her? It's a dynastic marriage. She brought Brittany to the crown, because she was the only heiress; her father had no sons. And basically, what then happened was the Duchy then passes to Francis I in perpetuity. And interestingly, let's see another picture, the next picture please: Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn was another one of her ladies-in-waiting. And it's at the court of Francis and Queen Claude that Anne Boleyn learns etiquette, she learns courtliness, and later on, she's going to put it to incredibly good use when she becomes, of course, the mistress and then the wife of Henry VIII. And it's fascinating to know that Diane de Poitiers, later the mistress of the King of France, and Anne Boleyn, later the mistress and wife of the King of England, were both ladies-in-waiting to Queen Claude. And as the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, in the incredible luxury of the court, they would've honed their etiquette. They would've honed their skill in flirtation. This is how women took power.

Now, we also know that Anne Boleyn was incredibly useful to Francis and to Henry VIII, when he visited for the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. She was already able to translate. So Claude, of course, is, the Queen, is of course, a dynastic pawn. And tragically, Francis, like many of his generation, had syphilis, which he passed on to her. And this is, and that of course, that's one of the reasons she died young. She had many, many miscarriages. Now, Francis had a mistress called Françoise de Foix who was supreme at court. So the queens, quite often, take second place to the mistresses. And I'll show you a picture of her later on. She was, and Françoise was an incredibly beautiful woman, very alluring, and she was Francis's official mistress for a whole decade. She was the mistress in, the supreme

mistress. And that was actually a role at the French court. Then we come to a really disastrous situation. Can we see the next slide, please? The Battle of Pavia. There is a, the French and the Habsburgs. Who is the man who is emerging as the most powerful man in the world? I'm sure you all know this, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Now, if you remember, Charles V, through a series of dynastic marriages, ruled the largest empire in the world. He was called Stupor Mundi. It was he who controlled all the Spanish possessions in the New World. Why? Because through his father's family, the Habsburg, he controlled much of central Europe. Through his mother's family, his mother, Joanna, was the daughter and heir to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, he controlled not just the Spanish dominions, but he also controlled much of the New World, because I'm sure you all know, Ferdinand and Isabella, they were the individuals who paid for Christopher Columbus to cross the ocean. This is a very, very exciting time. And this is the battle of Pavia, when Francis I, the terrible rivalry between the house, the French house, and the Habsburgs in the Battle of Pavia. Now, what happens at the Battle of Pavia, Francis I is captured and he's held in Madrid, and tragically, whilst he's... And he's held in Madrid, and in order to ransom him, his two younger sons were brought, were sent to Madrid as hostages. So his two young sons, should we have a look at the princes? Can we see the next slide, please? There you see Francis and Henry. Francis, who is not going to rule, he's going to die young. And Henry, the one who will be the lover of Diane de Poitiers, they are sent as hostages to a castle in Madrid, where they have a very, very bad time. And I want to bring somebody else to your attention. Because going back to Diane de Poitiers, after the death of Queen Claude, she served again, she served as lady-in-waiting to Louise of Savoy, who was the mother of Francis I. And then later on, she serves as a lady-in-waiting to Francis I's second wife. So basically, she's always at court. And when Diane's husband died in 1531, from then on, she adopted black and white as her colours. They were the colours of mourning. And from then on, they become her colours. And later on, when she is the acclaimed mistress of Henry II, the whole of the court is going to wear black and white. They were her colours. There are some very, very bad movies about Diane de Poitiers. I found one years ago, I'd forgotten all about it. It starred Lana Turner as Diane de Poitiers, and a very, very young Roger Moore as Henry IV. But, and of course, unfortunately, it's completely fiction. The only thing that I think they got correctly, they performed correctly with the costumes. Now, and they also with Diane, remember her name is Diane, and that's the Roman moon goddess, Diana, and the black and white, the symbolic colours of the sides of the moon. So she adopts those colours. she's in mourning; but , they suited her; and , they, if you like, they attested to her almost ethereal qualities.

Now, she was so good at financial matters, and she was obviously a favourite of Francis I, that she'd managed to maintain and retain the payments of her husband. Her husband was a Grand Martial of Normandy, and through the courts, she was allowed to keep the revenues. And so

obviously, she was very much trusted by Francis I. To allow a widow to manage the estates of her husband was incredibly rare. And it also attests to a very, very shrewd woman. Now, we also know that when the young princes were taken away to Madrid, they were needed as hostages. And his grandmother's lady-in-waiting, because his mother, of course, is now dead, gave him his farewell kiss. So when he was a young boy, about to go into exile, in hostage with his brother, it's Diane de Poitiers, evidently she made a huge impression on him. Later on, of course, the boys are ransomed and he comes back to court. And when Francis I, who is Henry's elder brother, as a teenager, he marries Eleanor of Austria to consolidate the war. The war is over now. We need to make peace. How do we make peace? We will create a dynastic marriage. And there's a tournament, and at the jousting tournament, Francis, of course, the elder son, wore the colours of his new wife, while young Henry wore the colours of Diane de Poitiers. Based on the correspondence and in letters, they wrote a lot of letters to each other, he was incredibly fixated on her. Remember, she'd given him the maternal kiss. When his own mother died, she'd been around. And then, now he comes back to court. He's older than her and it, she's much older than him. And from the letters we conclude that she becomes his mistress in 1534, when he was 15 years old. And it's actually a year before that that Henry married the formidable, the absolutely formidable Catherine of Aragon. Can we see Eleanor of Austria, please, who is the second wife of, she is the second wife of Francis I. She now is, you know, in charge of the court. But don't forget, Francis has a mistress who really is ruling. So in the court and in all the intrigue, Henry, who is the second son, a marriage is to be made to Catherine de' Medici. Can we see the next slide, please? This is Françoise de Foix, the powerful mistress of Francis I, who's going to become an adversary of Diane de Poitiers. The next slide, please. This is the marriage of Henry, the second son of the king, to Catherine de' Medici. Many of the very snobby courtiers thought that it was a terrible marriage. Why? Because of course, Catherine, if you think about it, Catherine de' Medici came from that extraordinary Medici family who we have talked about in the past on Lockdown. And once you have the, and once the website is up, and I'm told it's very soon, you will be able to get those previous lectures. But Catherine de' Medici, she came from an extraordinary family. They started out really as money lenders and bankers, and within three or four generations, they were princes of the Renaissance. Those of you who love art, and those of you who've listened carefully to Patrick's lectures, and those of you who have visited Italy, I mean, so many of the great individuals, or the great artists, were commissioned by the Medici family. And her uncle was actually Pope Clement VII. And a marriage is arranged with a huge dowry. And also, because Francis wants his son to be close to, he wants the close marriage, a dynastic pawn in a game close to the papacy. So it's a dynastic marriage. And ironically, even though the majority of the court were against it, Diane de Poitiers thought that it was an absolutely excellent idea, as she was actually related to Catherine's maternal grandfather. And tragically, these two young

people, they have a very, very tainted legacy because both their fathers and grandfathers had syphilis. And it's going to be no wonder that tragically, the children of Henry and Catherine are going to meet very, very sad ends. Now. Now, they don't have children for 10 years. And by this time, Diane is completely in control of Henry. And it's she who insists that he visits the marital bedchamber, and also Diane nurses Catherine back to health when she's ill. She doesn't see Catherine de' Medici as any kind of threat. You've got to remember, she had an incredible hold over Henry. And of course, Henry being the King, he did have a few dalliances. But she is going to remain, Diane will remain the mistress in title until his death, and that makes her the most powerful woman in France. Now, as I said, when Francis I was still around, she still, she had to compete with his mistress. And the mistress didn't like a rival, so she convinced her lover that Diane and Henry were working against her. In fact, it becomes even more important because Henry's brother Francis dies, and Francis is now the Dauphin, he is heir to the throne of France. Catherine was already accused of being a poisoner. She was terribly unpopular at court. She is the Italian poisoner. And I'm going to talk more about Catherine afterwards, because she was a ruthless woman. I watched a Netflix series on Catherine de' Medici called "The Serpent Queen." And honestly, it is such a terrible load of tosh. And what I can't cope with when I watch these epics, which no doubt have cost millions and made millions, if they told the real story, it actually would've been much more interesting. And what happens is, so Henry is now at loggerheads with his father, and that led to Henry retreating to his own château. And he and his father did not reconcile till 1545, which also shows you in a way, power of women. But how women had to take power, they had to take power, if you like, in a, you know, through guile, through seduction. There's absolutely no doubt that Diane kept Henry completely welded to her. And let me read you the report. This is actually from the ambassador to the Holy Roman Empire. "Henry was so besotted with Diane de Poitiers that his wife had no influence. Diane was at the centre of patronage. In the presence of guests," and now, I'm reporting from the letters sent to Charles V, "In the presence of guests, Henry would sit on his mistress's lap, play the guitar, chat about politics, and fondle her breasts." That is the future king of France at his château. And what does it tell us about Henry? He was very, very childlike, and he's being ordered into his wife's bed by his mistress. And in the end, Catherine is going to produce a lot of children. Can we see the next slide, if you don't mind? There you see Catherine de' Medici in later life. Unfortunately, she was not a great beauty, but she's going to prove to be an incredibly interesting, clever, and wily woman. And as I said before, these were not the attributes that were admired at the court. Can we go on, please? There you see, Henry. Of course, in the end, Francis I dies and Henry comes to the throne. What he does is he banishes his father's mistress. And now this is the era of Diane de Poitiers. Her lover is on the throne. He is King of France. And she got into the habit, a very, very strange habit, because remember, she is a lot

older than him, she's actually over 20 years older than her lover. Can you imagine the kind of women who are throwing themselves at him? It's absolutely imperative that she keeps control. So consequently, she believed that the ingestion of a certain amount of gold would keep her beautiful. And every day, she actually sipped a little bit of liquid gold. And we know that when Henry becomes king, she is so powerful that, for example, when the Pope sent a present to Catherine de' Medici, the Queen of France, he also sent priceless pearls to Diane de Poitiers. Henry created her the Duchesse de Valentinois. Can we see another picture of Diane? There you see the children, here you see the children of Henry and Catherine. Three of them are going to become kings of France, one after the other. They're all going to die young. And the daughter, her eldest daughter, Margot, is going to marry Henry of Navarre, who becomes king after the death of the three surviving sons, okay? So this is important. These are the children of Henry and Catherine. They really didn't stand a chance with that kind of genetic pool. And Margot, there is a very good film called "La Reine Margot", again, it's fiction, but that is actually a good film. And if you want to go onto the net, there are so many television series made by French television about these particular rulers. But these are the children of Catherine and Henry, the surviving children. In the end, they managed to have nine children. And it's the Reine Margot who marries the man, the Prince of Navarre, Henry IV, who is going to put France back on the road. And he, those of you who can get into the dynastic story, he is going to be the grandfather of Louis XIV. And that's how the symmetry all comes together. But going back to, let's have a look at the Duchesse de Valentinois.

Can we see, there you see. And look at the way she's being painted. Now, this woman is into her late 50s at this stage, and he gives her the most incredible, she's also made, she's given many different grants of land. And in fact, she's given a huge grant of land that had previously belonged to her enemy, who, Francis's mistress. So she is incredibly powerful now. What she does is she takes favours for her sons-in-law. Now ironically, she was incredibly useful to Henry. As I said, she's very bright, she's very beautiful, and that's how she ruled. And also through the maternal streak that obviously appealed to Henry. I'm sure psychologists would have a field day with all these relationships. She was very confident and she wrote many of his official letters and they were signed jointly, "Henry and Diane". And the other point, and I don't know how Catherine de' Medici could have felt about this, but she was in charge of his daughters', of all his children's education. And not only that, her daughter, Françoise, managed Catherine de' Medici's household as chief lady-in-waiting. So Catherine has to bite her tongue and bide her time. This incredibly clever woman, who spends much of her time, as it were, studying. She was a great figure of the Renaissance. Remember, she is a Medici. She surrounded herself with all sorts of interesting Italians, many of whom, she was fascinated by astrology, she was fascinated by astronomy. But I'll come on to that later. Now, it all comes to a

tragic end. Why? To cement another peace treaty with the Holy Roman Empire, there is a betrothal of one of Catherine's daughters, Elisabeth, to Philip II of Spain. Now slot yourselves into history. Charles V abdicates, leaving the throne of Spain and the low countries to his son, Philip. Philip II, the one who went against Elizabeth, and the rest of the Habsburg Empire to his brother, Ferdinand. France is in the middle. France needs to make peace. So France marries Catherine and Henry's daughter, remember there are nine children, seven survive, his daughter Elisabeth is married to Philip II of Spain. Evidently it was an incredible love match, and he mourned her deeply. Later on, those of you who love English history, he marries Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry VIII by Catherine of Aragon. Cousins, first cousins, second cousins, all intermarrying. It's extraordinary that any of them were a little bit sane. But going on, Catherine, so Catherine, his daughter, age 13, is betrothed. And there's a huge, there's a huge banquet. There's extraordinary, you can just imagine the beauty, because this is the French court laying out its wares for the Spanish court. So just imagine what's going on. And there's to be jousts. And Henry jousts in front of his lady love, wearing the colours, black and white, of Diane de Poitiers. He enters a joust. Can we see the next slide, please? This is by the way, the Château de Chenonceau, which he gives to Diane, one of the most beautiful châteaux in France. This is a great love token, isn't it? Isn't it gorgeous? And that was given to Diane de Poitiers as a present from a lover. The next slide, please. But it all comes to an end, because the 40 year-old Henry, jousting, and he is jousting with one of his nobles when the lance pierces his eye, and it splinters and he falls from the horse. He's carried. But you know the state of medicine at this period, and he dies a terrible, terrible death. It took him nine days to die. Let's see the deathbed scene. There you see the deathbed scene, and you can see what the doctors are trying to do, all the potions and everything that they were trying to do to save the King. And of course, they couldn't save the King. And this is where Catherine comes into her own. She refuses to allow Diane into the chamber, even though the King is calling out for her. But when he dies, she's not allowed to attend the funeral. And she is actually, but Catherine does not exact a terrible revenge. She takes back the château that she already, she's always wanted, the Château Chenonceau, because that's, she'd always dreamt of it. She took that back, but Diane is exiled to another château. Let's have a look at that. I think we have a picture of it. I hope I put one in. Yes, that's where she spent her last years. She had a very comfortable exile. When she was 64 years old, she fell from her horse. She went riding every day. She never really recovered. And she died a year later, and she was buried in a funeral chapel near her castle. And during the French Revolution, the tomb was desecrated and the remains were thrown into a mass grave. Now that's, this happened a lot in the Revolution. So, and we're going to see that many of the bones of the aristocrats, that the fury that was engendered. And of course, I'll be talking about that later on, as will William, as will Patrick. We'll all be coming again at it from our different angles. But that is where

she is exiled to. And now, of course, the power passes to Catherine de' Medici.

Now, Catherine de' Medici, remember she was an incredibly bright woman, and she is going to really take over the regency of her first two sons. Her first son, Francis II, he takes the throne on the death of his father in 1559. He'd been married to Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary, Queen of Scots, think about it. A child of the Tudor house. She'd lived her life in France. But of course, the very sickly Francis dies within a year. And Mary, who he loved very much, is sent back to Scotland. Her second son, Charles IX, he's going to rule from 1560 until 1574. And Catherine is the regent in his period. She controls him. And one of the ways she kept power, she was a fascinating woman, she surrounded herself with beautiful women and they were called the Flying Squadron, because she understood that to rule well, she needed spies. So the most beautiful women of the court really were her sexual spies, ambassadors, princes, kings, visiting dignitaries. And the story is, and I don't know if it's true, that's what the books say, that's what the memoirs say, but I don't believe it, that the women had to have 15-inch waists. But unfortunately, it's going to give Catherine a very, very bad reputation. But this is a woman knowing how to worm secrets. How does she do it? She surrounds herself with these extraordinarily beautiful women. Now unfortunately, during this period, the religious wars in France completely blow. Some of the French nobility had become Protestant, the Huguenots. One of the leading Catholic nobles was the Duke de Guise. And there's incredible hostility between the two. And it all culminates in the St. Bartholomew's Night's massacre, when, in order to try and make peace, Catherine marries her daughter Margot to Henry of Navarre. All the Protestant lords are there, and there is the most terrible massacre. How much was Catherine involved in it? It's a very moot question, but it happens in her reign. And this is really fanaticism at its height, Catholicism versus Protestantism. And of course, Henry of Navarre is a Protestant. So, two years later, her very sick son dies, to be replaced by her favourite son, Henry. Henry at the time had become king of Poland. Why? Because the Polish crown was at the gift of the Polish Parliament and he was elected King. He's immediately sent for, and he comes back to France to rule. Catherine didn't have such an easy time with him, because he was older. He was also, he was a homosexual, and he surrounded himself with his lovers. It was a very, very extraordinary time of debauchery. Yet against the backdrop, one of the other sides of Catherine de' Medici was her incredible love of culture. She actually was responsible for devising, really, the first ballet at the court. Just think about the rarefied nature of the French aristocracy and all the visiting princes and kings. And she's at the centre of it. So there is ballet, there is drama, there's an extraordinary atmosphere. Little plays are put on. And this really sets the scene, I think, for later on, the era of Louis XIV, where Versailles is going to become the absolute centre of the Sun King. But Catherine, in her own way, does this. And now, let's talk a little bit

about her reputation, because she had a doctor, let's see, let's have a look at him. The next slide, please. This was her doctor, Nostradamus, Thomas de Nostredame. Thomas de Nostredame is one of the most extraordinary characters that I have ever come across. And I'm sure even those of you who don't know much about this period will know about Nostradamus. Now Nostradamus, now this is where we come to the Jewish connection. Believe it or not, Nostradamus was the child of conversos, Jews who had fled the inquisition to Avignon. He studied medicine at Avignon. And not only that, he also was very involved in astrology, and according, and did he have the gift of sight? There are so many people who read his quatrains today and believe that he predicts the future. Now certainly, Catherine remembered, she'd actually set up a tower, and Patrick was telling, talking, it's actually quite near one of Patrick's favourite restaurants, where he, and also another, another astronomer of Catherine's, a man called Ruggeri, who was another Italian. This is why she had such a bad reputation. Astrology and astronomy was very closely connected. Catherine was believed to be a witch because she consorted with these kind of characters. Ironically, there's a queen in England, Elizabeth, one of the greatest queens England ever had, falls into this period, remember. After the death of Henry VIII, remember his son Edward, then Mary, then Elizabethan England. Catherine and Elizabeth and Roxelana are all ruling at the same time. Catherine had her own astrologer, a man called John Dee. They did believe it. You know, it comes out of humanistic thought. It comes out of a certain spirituality. Also, I believe, a certain failure of the religious establishment. They're looking for answers. And certainly, Nostradamus was her doctor and he was doctor to her children. But he also evidently told her fortune. And there are certain individuals who interpret some of Nostradamus's quatrains as recounting the deaths of her children. Catherine actually predeceased her last son. Her last son, Henry, was, in fact, assassinated by a Catholic fanatic. The Catholic Henry is assassinated by a Catholic fanatic who believed he was implicated in the death of the Duke de Guise. And then the throne passes to Henry of Navarre. Henry of Navarre, who was an extraordinary man, he was the man who said, "Paris is worth a Mass." He converted to Catholicism. And not only that, he wanted to rule over a France where every man could have a chicken in his pot on a Sunday. So Catherine dies four months before her oldest son. Did she, did those portrayings that Nostradamus, when he predicted the future of her children, is that how she interpreted them? We will never know, but we know they were very close. But Nostradamus himself was an incredibly learned man. And remember, he was also a medic. And one of the problems, one of the things that was held against Nostradamus is that he had studied the medicine of the Arab world. So the only Jewish connection to this story is in fact Nostradamus, a man that so much is told about, but so much is really little known. So I think I'll stop there. And it was interesting for me to go outside my own area and study this kind of, I've always loved this period, actually, I find it fascinating. So let's have a look at the questions.

Q & A and Comments

- Oh, this is a compliment from Wendy. "Thank you so much for funding the new National Library in Israel." Yes, this was an incredible presentation. And what an amazing, and what an amazing library. And Jennifer's saying that, "Everyone's happy with Patrick, it was, he was fine."

- Yes, the Château Chenonceau, Indie, is in the Loire Valley, and she designed much of the interiors.

- Margaret: "In the painting of the marriage of Catherine de' Medici, she looks pregnant." She was definitely not pregnant. That is the fashion of the time. In fact, the Austrian, the ambassador to the Holy Roman empire, he said she was short and pinched and rather unattractive, and very thin, which was not fashionable at the time. And as I said, it was 10 years before he had children by her. In the end, Diane was actually sending him to the bedchamber. I suppose an older woman wouldn't want a beautiful young princess.

- Yes, one of the children I mentioned was married to Mary, Queen of Scots, her eldest son, Francis, yes.

Q: "Why did Charles V abdicate?"

A: Honestly, I really think he'd had enough. He'd fought the wars of religion. He tried to hold that terrible empire together. He was sick and he finished, he died a year after abdication. He went to stay in a monastery. And he divided his empire between Philip II of Spain, and of course, Philip II of Spain and his brother Ferdinand. Once the website is up, I think William and Patrick and I, we will, I think we should insert family trees, because particularly when I'm teaching Jewish history, which I haven't been doing today, it's so intricate. You have to, and to study this, we are really, it's not just studying French history. We're looking at European history. It's almost bringing a whole muck together.

Q: "Did these marriages between relatives need the permission of the Pope, like Catherine of Aragon to Henry VIII did?"

A: Yes, but the point is the Popes would usually... Look, the Pope was never, Clement VII was Catherine de' Medici's uncle. He wanted the marriage. One of the things about the Popes at this period, they're not actually very spiritual, you know. One of the reasons Protestantism developed, look, when in 1517, Shelly, it begins when Martin Luther nails those 95 Theses to a church door at Wittenberg. What do you think those 95 Theses are about? The abuses in the Church. Who was Pope in 1590? Who was Pope in 1590, 1594? 1494, beg your

pardon. The Borgia pope. So see the popes as princes, Renaissance princes. So of course, Martin Luther, Protestantism. Look, princes became Protestant. Sometimes they believed, but usually it was a way of breaking away from the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, but for the ordinary folk. So basically, the reason the Pope refused to annul the marriage of Catherine of Aragon to Henry VIII is quite simple. Charles V was Holy Roman Emperor. The Pope was in his pocket. And not only that, and Catherine of Aragon was his aunt. So there's no way he's going to allow the divorce of his aunt. That's why Henry VIII became a Protestant. He wasn't a Protestant theologically, although Anne Boleyn was, he wasn't at all. He wanted to become head of the Church. And the reason he wanted to marry Anne Boleyn is he wanted a son. And in those days, go back to the role of women. It was believed that women were the ones who predetermined the sex of a child. If you couldn't have children, it had to be the woman's fault. If only girls were born, it's the woman's fault.

- Yes, Henry, yes, of course, Pamela, Nostradamus did predict Henry's death. Yes. If you want to go the route of Nostradamus, there are many people who think, who really take his predictions very, very seriously. And certainly Catherine de' Medici did. We don't know what he told her. That's the problem.

Q: "Where there are no private letters between Catherine de' Medici and Nostradamus?"

A: Thank you. I'm not sure about that. Judith, can you ask Patrick when he talks? He will give you a much, he will know that immediately.

- Thank you, Minnie.

Q: "Did Diane de Poitiers have any children?"

A: Yes, she had two children by her first husband, who was 39 years older than her. And they were given important places at court. In fact, her elder daughter became the chief lady-in-waiting to Catherine, and her son-in-laws become very important. Now, if you want a bit of medical history, it seems that Henry II, there was, Henry II, there was something wrong with him and he had to have a correction because he had no children with Catherine. By the time, or perhaps by the time he's impregnating his wife, it's too late for her to bear children. Remember, she was 41 when they started their affair.

Q: "How true is the depiction of Catherine's childhood in 'The Serpent Queen'?"

A: If you're looking for facts, don't look for that. Certainly there was a lot of, there was a sack of Rome. Yes, that did happen. It was a time of great unease. But no, the grand, the Medici, and she had a lot of insecurities. Her parents died very, very young. Yeah, she didn't

come from a secure background at all. But I really wouldn't take "The serpent Queen" very seriously. As I said, if you want to make a film on Catherine de' Medici, the historical evidence is so interesting. I mean, the story of Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de' Medici, but also the story of her relationship with Nostradamus and Ruggeri, it's fascinating. So why not go for that?

- Audrey says, "This very much indicates the political machinations and the deviousness of monarchies and religious leaders. Best regards from Cape Town."

- Yes, Gail is saying, "If you ever visit Loire Valley, don't miss Chenonceau, in my opinion, the most beautiful of the many châteaux built by the kings of France. Leonardo da Vinci lived later in his life at the nearby Château d'Amboise."

- Yes, of course, the Loire Valley is absolutely amazing. But if you think about it, that château, given to a mistress, then taken back by a queen, whilst the peasants are starving. I think that's the end of the questions. Lots of love. Love to everybody. Bye.