Patrick Bade | La Belle Juive

– I'm going to start this talk by putting a couple of questions to you. Here are two portraits by Ingres, two of his most famous masterpieces. And I'm going to ask you, which one of these two women would you feel most comfortable sitting next to at a dinner party? It's a question I quite often ask people about famous portraits of the past. See if we can get a bit closer to the two. My guess is that most people would much rather sit next to the lady on the left, rather than one on the right. She's got a very gentle, warm expression on her face. That is the Baronne de Rothschild, on the left hand side. Baron James de Rothschild. And the right hand side is Madame Moitessier. She might be really hard going at the party. She's rather cool, imperious, and vacuous. I don't think she'd have a very sparkling conversation. And I'm asking you the same question here about these portraits of his, of sisters. It's the Ena and Betty Wertheimer on the left hand side, by Sargent, that was shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1901. And the Hoare sisters, the rather unfortunately named Hoare sisters, 'cause certainly looked like they were anything but, on the right hand side by Millais dating from the 1870s. And well, I know which pair of sisters I'd rather spend an evening with, the one, I think the Wertheimer sisters looked to me like they would've been a lot of fun. And obviously Sargent thought so, 'cause he was a regular dinner guest in their house. The rather sad looking Hoare sisters. Oh dear. They're a kind of cliche, aren't they? Of the Englishwoman that many foreign people have, being sort of uptight, frigid, you know, the "Lie back and think of England" cliche of the English. And again, I don't think they, well, I don't think they would laugh at my jokes somehow, so it might be a rather boring and uncomfortable evening. So we're dealing here with cliches, with stereotyping. The Wertheimer girls, they're, you know, they're nice, warm, loving, sexy Jewish girls. And you could say that in both, in any great portrait, there is an element of caricature.

Now in this talk this evening, I'm dealing with a stereotype. It's a stereotype of, a 19th century stereotype, of Jewish women. So I can already see maybe some questions piling up, people saying "Isn't stereotyping always a bad thing?" My very dear friend, Truda Levy, who was a survivor and she used to go out to schools to talk about her experiences, and to warn about the dangers of racism and antisemitism. She always ended every talk with the same warning. "Don't generalise or stereotype "any particular group of people." I would agree with her, although of course we all do it. I think the important thing is that we keep an eye on what we are doing, we're aware of what we're doing. Anyway, the stereotype I'm talking about tonight is not the worst of stereotypes that have been come up with about the Jews. It's a stereotype that Jewish women are warmer, more lively, more intelligent and more sexy than Christian women, or women of other faiths. And you may say, well, as we shall see later on, however

positive that might seem, there is actually, I would say, a darker side to that stereotype. Oh, here we are again, coming a little bit closer into the rather tense, uptight faces of the Hoare sisters, and the wonderfully relaxed, and warm, and charming Wertheimer girls.

Now I'm starting off here with story of how France got its inverted commerce, North African and Oriental Empire. It started in 1830. It was a story that was once known to every French school child in 1830. The French consul to the ruler of Algiers, the Dey of Algiers, was so rude and arrogant that the outraged Dey of Algiers swatted him in the face with a fly swat. And the French government of the day took that as an excuse to invade Algeria and to expand into North Africa, and then of course into the Middle East. That's 1830, four years later, 1834, the French sent a military and diplomatic expedition to North Africa, landing in Algiers and moving westwards, and ending up in Morocco. And this expedition was accompanied by the great French artist Delacroix. And he was incredibly impressed by North Africa. He was very fascinated by the light, the intensity of the light. He made all sorts of observations about shadows in intense sunlight, colour in shadows. He also found the North Africans very beautiful and very dignified. He said that this is how he felt the ancients, the Romans and the Greeks, must have looked. They moved with great grace and dignity. And he, of course he was very fascinated by women. We know that from his diary. But there were few opportunities to see or observe Arab women, or Islamic women. 'Cause of course they covered their faces. And men who are not part of the family were not invited into the female parts of Arab households, which are kept very separate from the male parts. So in fact, his only opportunity, really, for observing the native women of North Africa was in Jewish families. And he found them very fascinating indeed. And he kept a diary through this whole experience, and he made countless drawings. And on one occasion he attended a Jewish wedding, and he eagle-eyed, he observed everything. He wrote copious notes about this wedding, the movements of the women, the poses, the effects of light, and the costumes, and so on. I mean, pages and pages of very detailed notes about this event. And the result was this painting, which is one of the most famous French paintings of the 19th century, of a Jewish wedding in North Africa. Delacroix was followed by many other French artists throughout the 19th century into the 20th century, up until, of course, the time of Matisse, who also spent lots of time in North Africa. These are drawings by an artist who could be described as a follower of Delacroix, Theodore Chassériau. Again, they're drawings of Jewish women, and he made a number of paintings, obviously, enjoying their wonderful, colourful, rich, exotic costumes. And many writers made the same trip in the 1880s. Guy de Maupassant visited Tunisia and he published an essay, You can see the title is "De Tunis à Kairouan." And he was Tunis, at the time, was a very Jewish city. About a third of the population of Tunis was Jewish. And there was a large Jewish section of the town. And once again, he was absolutely fascinated by the Jewish women. Here is a description of young Jewish girls in the

Jewish quarter of Tunis. "Their pale, slightly unhealthy complexions "of delicate luminosity. Their fine features, "such sweet features, of an ancient and exhausted race "whose blood has never been renewed. "Their dark eyes under pale foreheads, "overwhelmed with dark, massive, "astonishingly thick and heavy hair. "And their supple allure when they run from one door "to another, filling the Jewish quarter of Tunis "with a vision of troubling little Salomes." So these, he noticed that these lovely lithe young girls, when they reached marriageable age, they were fattened up for the wedding. Here are drawings of Jewish brides, by Delacroix on the left hand side, and a painting of the same subject by Chassériau on the right hand side. He said, "Seated next to one another like symbolic idols "covered in silks and luxurious finery, "goddesses of flesh and metal with golden leggings, "and in their heads golden horns." And so many Europeans visited North Africa during this period as tourists, quite a lot used to go for health reasons in the winter. And there was a brisk trade in the late 19th, early 20th century in picture postcards of native women, particularly of Jewish women. And these I suppose are discreet, discreetly erotic picture postcards.

Now the reputation of Jewish women for being seductive has precedent in the Bible, going back, of course, to the very first woman, Eve, who according to the Bible, seduced Adam into biting from the forbidden fruit, and introduced him to sex for the first time. And there are other quite sexy and naughty women in the Bible. This is Tamar, who somehow managed to trick Judah into impregnating her. This is a painting in the Wallace Collection by Horace Vernet, in which she seems to be suffering from some kind of wardrobe malfunction. And there are more overtly wicked, seductive Jewish women like Delilah, who entraps and brings about the downfall of Samson, and Judith, or, I know she's not, strictly speaking, in the Jewish Bible, 'cause she appears in an apocryphal book that, curiously, is accepted by Christians and not by most Jews. And then in the New Testament, of course there is Salome. We've already heard Guy de Maupassant make reference to her, who, in the late 19th century, becomes the ultimate femme fatale. And the artist who really brings this about is the French symbolist artist Gustave Moreau. If you visit his wonderful museum in Paris, it's a favourite museum of Trudy when when she comes, we usually go and see it. Wonderfully strange atmosphere, a bit like a movie set, and it's packed full of images of Salome. There are over 90 depictions of Salome, it was clearly total obsession with Gustave Moreau. Gustave Moreau's reputation was, in turn, created by descriptions of two of his paintings of Salome in a very notorious novel, "A Rebours," "Against Nature," by Joris-Karl Huysmans. And that was published in 1884. And has a, they're incredibly lurid descriptions of the Salome paintings that go on over pages. But also in this book, there is an expression, I would say, of the darker side of this stereotype of Jewish women being more essential and more sexy. On the right hand side is a photograph of Huysmans himself, who soon after he wrote this book, actually took to a kind of fundamentalist

Catholicism, as you can see from the way he's posed beneath the crucifix. But the anti-hero of the book, des Esseintes, he's a decadent aristocratic aesthete, and he tries to make a social experiment. He wants to create a criminal or a murderer. And so he picks up an innocent 16-year-old boy in the street and he takes him to a high-class brothel. And as he introduces the little boy to the sexiest prostitute in the brothel, who is, in inverted commas, 'La Belle Juive,' and explains that, of course every brothel has to have one; A 'belle Juive,' that is a Jewish woman who is more adept in the arts of love than a woman of Christian background would be. So she has sex with the boy, and his plan is that he pays for repeat visits, several repeat visits, to make the boy into a sex addict. And then he's going to withdraw the funding for his brothel visits. And by that time, the boy will be so completely addicted to the belle Juive that he will do anything to keep up the visits, and he'll have to turn to crime and even to murder. In fact, we don't find out in the novel what happens in the end. And we don't know if, in fact, the diabolical plan of des Esseintes succeeded or not. Now we move on to a very notorious Jewish courtesan. She's one of the most famous notorious courtesans of the 19th century. We English people think of the 19th century as the Victorian period, very uptight, very prudish. And, but it was also, it always used to make me laugh when Mrs. Thatcher said, "Oh, let's go back to Victorian values." And I thought, "Hmm, well some of those values "were not all that wonderful." So prostitution was rife everywhere. It was reckoned in London that one woman in 16, of the entire female population in London, was engaged in prostitution. And I'm sure that proportion would've been a lot higher in Paris. Paris was the prostitution capital of the world. And there were different levels of prostitution, from the humble streetwalkers up to the grande horizontale, the great courtesans, and the grandest of the grande horizontale was La Païva. She wasn't always grande. She was born into a desperately poor Jewish family in Moscow. Her father was a street peddler. She was extremely ambitious. The, I think what astonished people about her was people didn't think she was all that beautiful. She achieved her position through willpower. And I've got a quote here from the Goncourt Brothers' journal, Goncourt Brothers, fascinating source material, fascinating document for 19th century Paris. Very unpleasant. They're extremely unpleasant brothers, very bitchy. You know, if you had dinner with them, you knew that they were going to say something horrible about you behind your back. They were also extremely antisemitic. But anyway, they went, they were invited to La Païva on the 3rd of January, 1868. And this is what they wrote in the diary. "At table, she expanded a frightening theory of willpower, "saying that everything was a result "of an effort of the will, and that there was no such thing "as fortuitous circumstances, "that one created one's own circumstances. "And that unfortunate people were only unfortunate "because they did not want to stop being unfortunate. "She spoke of a woman who, "in order to attain some unspecified aim, "shut herself up for three years, "completely cut off from the world, "scarcely eating anything, "and often forgetting about food, walled up

within herself "and entirely given over to the plan she was developing. "And she concluded 'I was that woman.'" Well, she succeeded. She managed to get to Paris from Moscow. My guess is she probably had to walk most of the way, she would have arrived, I think, in Paris before the advent of railways. She married a tailor that was probably her best prospect as a Jewish girl from a very poor background. She divorced him. She then briefly, oh no, she then had an affair with a very prominent concert pianist called Heinrich Hertz. He who was a rival of Liszt's, and she managed to ruin him. And then she briefly married a Portuguese aristocrat. He was a Count Païva. So that's how she got, she was Countess La Païva, but then her great triumph was getting hold of this man. He was Count Henckel von Donnersmarck. He was one of the richest aristocrats in Europe, owned vast swathes of land, silver mines and so on in Silesia. And so the interesting thing about this is that he, a lot of people when they saw them together in public, thought he was much more beautiful than she was. He was considerably younger, and they wondered how this rather unattractive middle-aged woman was able to entrap this man. Well, these are the Donnersmarck diamonds that he gave to La Païva. And actually they were sold at Sotheby's in, I think, 2016, for 10 million dollars. But these were just trinkets. He built for her a private palace on the Champs-Élysées, which was the most expensive private house constructed in Paris under the Second Empire, that's the period 1852 to 1870. And amazingly it still exists, perhaps appropriately, it's now a gentleman's club, and it is possible to visit it. I mean, it's privately owned, but you have to book well, even months in advance. And I think you can only visit it on a Sunday morning. It is truly staggering for its... Ostentatious display of wealth, of everything is as expensive as it could possibly be. The architect, Manguin, the artists involved, like Jerome Bonnard, Carrier-Belleuse, they were the top artists of the day in terms, they were the most expensive artists that they could find. The staircase, imagine coming down that staircase, is made entirely from the semi-precious stone onyx. And her bathroom, you can see her bath is actually made of solid silver. So she had a kind of a salon which attracted many writers and artists in the 1860s. And people went, although it was uncomfortable, because apparently, coming from Russia, she liked cold temperatures, and she kept the house very cold, and she'd have windows open in the middle of the winter, and everybody was shivering, and she was, you know, exposing a great deal of flesh. And that was a cause of amazement. Nobody liked her. They were willing to accept her hospitality. But the Goncourt brothers, as I said, they're extremely bitchy about her, and said she was, they described her as an old courtesan. She was 41 when they visited her, looking like a provincial actress with a fake smile and fake hair. And they said, despite the great luxury in all the renaissance detail, that they thought the interiors of the Hôtel la Païva were in the worst possible taste. Delacroix went round for dinner twice in 1855, 7th of February, he, he wrote in his diary, "Dined with the celebrated countess, de Païva, "I disliked the appalling display of wealth." And then he, but it didn't

stop him going back again, on the 2nd of May. And he said, "This evening in the house of that boring woman, "Païva, conversation was trivial. "When I left that pest house at about 11:30, "it was a positive joy to breathe the air of the streets." Astonishingly, Donnersmarck actually married her. So she became a princess, a genuine Jewish princess. Here, more interiors, this, and the bed. Well, this is of course her office. This is the workplace. So every grande horizontale had to have a very, very spectacular bed.

Now we move on to a much more sympathetic character. This is Hortense Schneider. And if nobody had a good word to say about that Païva, I've never read a bad one about Hortense Schneider. Everybody was charmed by her. Everybody adored her. She was the daughter of a Jewish tailor in Bordeaux, whose family originally came from Alsace, and she came up to Paris in the 1850s. You could say her great period of fame lasted just over a decade. And it's defined by the two great Paris World Exhibitions of 1855 and 1867. She auditioned for a theatre, and was initially rejected, but Offenbach spotted her, and realised there was something very special about her. 1855 was really the year in which Offenbach launched his own career as a composer of operetta. And it reached a, then careers of both Offenbach and Schneider reached their climax in 1867 during that World Exhibition. And so she, there ecstatic descriptions of what she was like in the theatre. One critic said that every single man in the theatre felt personally seduced by her. And the other thing people, everybody commented on, that critics said, it's impossible to criticise her singing, because it's all so absolutely natural. Apparently Offenbach, when he auditioned her, he said, "Are you going to have more singing lessons?" And she said, "Yes, Maitre, of course." He said, "Miserable child, if you have another lesson, "I shall smack your bottom and tear up your contract." Apparently her way of singing was just like talking. It was so natural. And I think of the comment that Colette, the writer Colette made about one of my absolute favourite singers, Yvonne Printemps, who actually played the role of Hortense Schneider, in the movie about Offenbach's life, "La Valse de Paris," if you can get hold of that, it's an enchanting movie. Colette said about Yvonne Printemps "She doesn't sing, she breathes melodiously." So she had a double career. She was a huge star. So she certainly earned substantial amounts as the star of Offenbach operettas, but she was earning a hell of a lot more after hours, so to speak, say her horizontal earnings were much greater than her vertical earnings. And that actually she had an affair with the Duke, and they had, she had an illegitimate child, and it was because of that pregnancy that she missed out on taking part in the premiere of the first great full-length operetta, which was "Orpheus in the Underworld," and that was in 1858. But then she went on to star, in 1864, in the next great hit of Offenbach, which was "La Belle Hélène." And "La belle Hélène," there was a, a really a quartet of very talented people who contributed to the great success of this piece. Offenbach, of course, wrote the music. And Ludovic Halévy, you can see him by Degas on the left hand side, and in the photograph with

Henri Meilhac. Meilhac and Halévy, they were a team of librettists, they wrote the libretti for Carmen. and they wrote the libretti for all the great operettas of Offenbach. And they were creating his operas also, very much, operettas to display the talents of Hortense Schneider. So she plays Helen of Troy in "La belle Hélène," and she drove the audiences absolutely wild. And in her song, her invocation to Venus, she says, How do they translate that? "What pleasure do you find in bringing about the downfall "of the," and apparently in the , the word "cascade" is repeated, "cascade, cascade, la vertu." And the whole audience joined in shouting up, "cascade, cascade, cascade," yes, Spring Let your virtue fall. Her greatest triumph of all was in the 1867 World Exhibition where she played La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein. Here you see her in her painting, in that role, and a photograph taken at the time. And she plays a very naughty, flirty Grand Duchess who falls in love with a young soldier. You see, he's caught her eye on the left hand side, and she sings to him, Dupuis, "Tell him that I have noticed him." So if, when I take people to Paris, one of my favourite excursions is to explore the passage, these wonderful covered ways, 19th century covered ways around the Grande Boulevard. And you go down the Passage de Panoramas, and there's a little sideways passage, and you can go into the back of the Théâtre des Variétés, where "La Grande-Duchesse" was first performed in 1867. And here is an image of Hortense Schneider in her dressing room, receiving gentleman visitors. And of course for the World Exhibition of 1867, pretty well all the crown heads of Europe and the crown princes, they all came to Paris, the Tsar of Russia, the Kaiser of the, well he wasn't Kaiser then, no King of Prussia, our own dear Prince of Wales, Berty, later Edward VII, and a Shah of Persia, and royalty from King of Spain. So on, all came, and they all went backstage to pay homage to the great Hortense Schneider, and most of them, she then invited back to her apartment for more intimate sessions. And one disgruntled ex-lover took the apartment opposite Hortense Schneider's, and when the King of Sweden arrived, for instance, he would unfold the flag of Sweden and hang it out the window to embarrass the King of Sweden, who was trying to be incognito. So she retired at the height of her fame. She lived a long time. So, she was retired from the stage by 1870, and she lived another 50 years. She lived until 1920. She was an absolute, a doting, adoring mother to her illegitimate son, who was badly handicapped. And she really devoted her life to looking after him, and to charitable causes. But she didn't lose her, a certain streak of naughtiness. In the late 1870s, she was having lunch one day with Émile Zola, Renoir the painter, and Edmond Reir, who is the painter's brother. And Edmond, Renoir, and Zola were having a very earnest conversation about the meaning of art, and the importance of art. Renoir was never interested in that kind of thing. And he got very, very bored. And at a certain point in the conversation, he said, "Well, this is all very interesting." And then he turned to Hortense Schneider and he said, "Mme. Schneider, "let's talk about something much more interesting. "How are your breasts doing these days?" And she said, "Oh, you are

awful." And she opened up her blouse and she plunked her breasts on the table to show everybody that they were still in good nick.

So we now move on to two, in fact, I'm going to really devote the second half of this talk to two very great actresses, the two most famous French actresses of the 19th century Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt, and both were of Jewish origin. Rachel, she was known just by that one name. Her real name was Rachel Félix. And she, again, was of the humblest, humblest background. Once again, her father was just a street peddler, so rather like Païva, it was certainly a triumph of willpower over circumstances. She managed to get herself into the Paris conservatoire, and she was so extraordinarily talented that she then was taken on by the Comédie-Française, and had a great career there. But, and so she was, of course in the 19th century, as far as the French were concerned, any woman who appeared on stage, actually, almost any woman who was active outside the home, that the sort of domestic circumstances, was regarded as being either a prostitute or open to prostitution. Certainly, actresses were seen that way. And it was, for instance, one of the reasons why so many actresses, and singers too, were engaged in prostitution was that in the 19th century, actresses were expected to provide their own costumes. The costumes were very, very expensive. And certainly at the beginning of an actress's career, there was no way that their wages were going to cover the cost of the costumes. And so usually the only way to be able to present themselves well on stage with fine costumes was to engage in some kind of prostitution. And well, she was very, a bold, courageous woman, very much ahead of her time. She certainly had lots of wealthy... Oh, here is a painting of her. It's actually in your city art gallery, by, oh, English artist's name escapes me for the moment. I'll remember in a minute. You can see she was a striking woman, rather statuesque. And she had the, here is some, just some of her royal and aristocratic lovers, Comte Walewski was the illegitimate son of Napoleon and Marie Walewska. Prince Napoleon was the cousin of the emperor Louis Napoleon. Second from the right is the emperor himself. And on the extreme right is the Prince de Joinville. He was a royal prince. He was a son of King Louis Philippe. And he went to the theatre one night, and was bowled over by Rachel. And he sent round his card backstage, and he scribbled on the card when, where, how much. A rather crude advance, one would've thought that she wasn't put off. And she scribbled on the other side of the card, my place, anytime, nothing, and sent the card back to him. And also the, this is, she hired Émile de Girardin and... Oh God, very famous romantic poet, who was also the lover of George Sand for a while on the left hand side. So dreadful, getting old and forgetting these names. So she didn't just have rich men or powerful men as lovers. She also, well, had creative men, artists, as lovers. And she received actually many proposals of marriage. But she dismissively said, "I'd rather be rented than owned." I think that's a very good response, and a very good repudiation of marriage. But many of her wealthy lovers did fund an incredibly lavish lifestyle. This is her townhouse in Paris. Of

course you can see her carriage in front of it. That would've been an enormous status symbol. And it was lavishly overfurnished, in the taste of the time. You can see the salon de conversation of Rachel, more interiors of the house of Rachel. But she was not destined, well, very few of these women actually made, had a wealthy and comfortable old age, but she was tubercular. And by the time she was in her mid-thirties, it was very clear that she was not going to make old burns. Here you could, here you see her on a voyage to North Africa on a ship on the left hand side, in the hopes of curing her tuberculosis. But that failed. And she died at the age of 37. Here she is on her deathbed, and this is her tomb in Père Lachaise, in the Jewish section of Père Lachaise. Judy and I have been there. We paid a little pilgrimage to the tomb of Rachel.

And the last person I should be talking about tonight is Sarah Bernhardt. Sarah Bernhardt was the daughter of a courtesan. Here she is as a child with her mother, she claimed to be of Dutch Jewish origin. In fact, the family were of German Jewish origin. But after 1870, of course nobody wanted to own up to having German ancestry in France. It was more convenient for her to be Dutch than German. But she was always actually very, very proud of being Jewish. And I suppose Jews would recognise her as being Jewish, because it's through the mother's line. Her father was almost certainly not Jewish. Sarah Bernhardt, as I said, she was the most famous actress in France in the second half of the 19th century. The most famous actress in the world, according to many aesthetes and connoisseurs, she was not necessarily the best actress. There were others, like Eleonora Duse. People like Bernard Shore, the snobs, they all thought that Duse was essentially a finer and more sincere actress. The incredible fame of Sarah Bernhardt was, again, it's a matter of the triumph of the will, of willpower, of determination. And she cultivated all the new possibilities for creating celebrity. I'm going to be talking more about this theme in a week or two, when I talk about Jenny Lind, who, Jenny Lind, for a short time around 1850, became the most famous woman in the world, and the most famous woman who had ever lived. But she, this happened to Jenny Lind almost by accident. It wasn't something that Jenny Lind sought, but it was something that Sarah Bernhardt sought. And she was extremely intelligent, and extremely ambitious. And she, every new innovation that came along, photography, revolution in travel through steam trains and steam ships, mass circulation newspapers, the telegraph. And right at the end of her life, moving pictures and sound recordings, she was really up to the minute on exploiting all of these things to increase her own celebrity and fame. So there's no doubt that by the late 19th century, she had travelled more than any woman had ever travelled in history, and she was far more famous than any woman had ever been. These, she started off her career as, once again, she followed her mother's footsteps, even though she trained as an actress at the Conservatoire. She initially, she wasn't particularly serious about following up that career, and she became the lover of a Belgian prince, Prince de Ligne. She actually had a child by him,

Maurice. And she was a very dotting Jewish mother. She spoiled Maurice something rotten. And he was a bit of a cad, a bit of a rotter later on. Oddly, they landed up falling out over the Dreyfus affair. She was pro-Dreyfus and he was anti-Dreyfus. But when she appeared in London, and she took London by storm in the 1870s, and she was invited everywhere. She was invited to grand aristocratic houses, and she always had herself announced as "Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt, and her son," she took our son with her. So she was really advertising to the world, but of course, that she'd had an illegitimate son. But her career took off in the 1860s, and when she was still just beginning to make a name for herself, she made what are arguably the first ever glamour photographs, she posed for a series of photographs by the pioneer photographer Nadar. And, oh, how beautiful, isn't that the most incredibly beautiful and expressive face? She wasn't considered to be a conventional beauty, but she could make the impression of great beauty. Here's another photograph of her by Nadar. And so we'll see how all the way through her career, as I said, whenever there was some new innovation, I talked a couple of weeks ago about the birth of the poster as an art form. And she very quickly spotted the talent of Mucha. I'll tell you a bit more about that in a minute. And that was a great way for renewing and extending her image with the public. Oh, this, yes, I mentioned the fact that although she adored her son, there was a brief period where they weren't speaking to one another because he was an anti-Dreyfus. And this, I don't know whether you can read it. This is a letter that Sarah Bernhardt wrote to Émile Zola, supporting his campaign to prove the innocence of Alfred Dreyfus, a brave thing to do. You know, it would've been much safer in those dangerous times of hysterical antisemitism to keep her head down. She was a very courageous woman. I think everybody knows that. She she had terrible, terrible pain in one of her knees, really excruciating pain, that did not stop her continuing her career. And at one point she approached the next lover, Dr. Pozzi, and she said, "Look, I just can't stand this anymore. "Can you just remove my leg?" So he actually amputated her leg. Apparently it didn't really help with the pain. She still continued to feel the pain even though the leg wasn't there. But here you can see her during the first World War, visiting the front and being carried around. This is most probably her father. This is the Duke de Mounier, who is the illegitimate half brother of the Emperor Louis Napoleon. And a very brilliant man, a very brilliant politician. We don't have the DNA proof, we can't be absolutely sure that he was her father, and she wasn't openly acknowledged by him. But the fact that he took such an interest in her early career and intervened at the Conservatoire on her behalf, he was certainly a lover of her mother. And I think it's very likely that he was her father. Here are two men with whom she, she had quite an active love life. But after the initial affair with the Prince de Ligne, her lovers were normally actors. They were men, beautiful men, men that she fancied. On the left is the young Comte de Montesquiou, who actually is the model for the character of des Esseintes, the in the novel "A Rebours," which I talked about earlier. And he's also the

model for the character of Baron de Charlus, much later in his life, in "À la recherche du temps perdu," of Proust. And he was resolute. He was, they were great mates. They were very fond of one another. And she wanted, I think probably for charitable reasons, she thought that if she seduced him, she would cure him of his homosexuality, a delusional idea. As modern attempts at, you know, conversion therapy, I think have been demonstrated as being completely unscientific and ridiculous. But anyway, she did actually seduce him, but he, he vomited continuously for three days afterwards. So it wasn't a great success, and I don't think he had any desire to repeat the experiment. On the other hand, her best lover ever, she always said, was the hugely handsome and charismatic Dr. Pozzi, famously painted by Sargent, and I'm sure some of you read the the recent very popular book, "The Man in the Red Coat," by Julian Barnes. I recommend it. Very fascinating book. So I mean, it's not really a biography, it's really a portrait of the period of Dr. Pozzi He was the most famous gynaecologist in the world. And Sargent, I think, was also absolutely bewitched by him. He wrote a letter and said he was the most fascinating and seductive character. And he, the hands, of course, of the gynaecologist, they're the instruments of his work, and he's displaying them very elegantly in this portrait. Oh, this is, I think this is the Prince de Ligne, who's the father of her son. And this is Sarah, the very first role that caught the attention of the French public. This was in 1867. It's a play called "Le Passant," and it's a transvestite, is that right word, really, role, "travesti." She was, by the standards of the 19th century, when they, on the whole, they like women to be plump and well rounded. But she was borderline anorexic. She was very, very thin indeed, and notorious for that. And yes, she liked, there was a certain sexual ambiguity about her, and she liked, she played Hamlet, as you can see on the right hand side. And on the left hand side is a publicity photograph for a tour she made of the British Isles in the play "Pelléas and Mélisande," with Mrs. Patrick Campbell playing Mélisande, and Sarah paying Pelléas. She went from triumph to triumph, and aged 56, for the Paris World Fair of 1900, she had one of her greatest triumphs of all, in the role of L'Aiglon. L'Aiglon was the Duc de Reichstadt, he was the legitimate son of Napoleon and a Hapsburg princess, who had a rather short and rather unhappy life in exile in Vienna, and died of tuberculosis at the age of 21, to the huge disappointment of the French, who hoped that he was going to inherit his father's military genius and become a saviour for France. So, well again, it's a kind of triumph of will over reality, isn't it? A 56-year-old woman who is no longer as slender as she had been, heavily corseted, playing a 21-year-old boy. But in reality it worked. The audiences became absolutely hysterical. They were reduced to floods of tears by her performance as L'Aiglon. I'm going to show you her in a few other roles, here she is Cleopatra. This is not the Shakespeare play, but she played the role of Cleopatra in a number of plays. It was a wonderfully, like everything she did, over-the-top performance. And that of course led to one of the famous stories in theatrical history, of two Victorian English ladies going

to see Cleopatra as queen of ancient Egypt, going wildly, wildly over the top, coming out of the theatre terribly shocked. And one saying to the other, "Oh, so unlike the home life of our own dear queen." More images of Sarah as Cleopatra, and here she is at home. And so I think she was clearly ambitious. She was clearly totally narcissistic, as a lot of performing artists are. But everything I've read about her makes her seem actually a very, she was a nice Jewish girl. What can you say? She loved feeding people. She liked inviting people around to dinner, and to feed them well. She was very kind, and as I said, a very, very over-loving mother. So she was always playing a role, in life as well as on the stage. And she's, here you can, in this famous painting by Clairin, she's playing the femme fatale, isn't she? And you can see that, the twist of the body, the way the body actually flows into this huge dog at her feet, the dog seems to be actually part of her. And so she lived in great splendour. Her house was, again, like a theatrical set for a melodrama, and yes. And now what about her acting? As I said, the real connoisseurs thought that there was something artificial and rather fake about her acting. George Bernard Shaw is very interesting. He wrote very detailed comparisons between Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse, greatly to the advantage, I say, of Eleonora Duse. She's famous for her death scenes, "The Lady of Camélia," "Adrienne Lecouvreur." And it's interesting how many of the plays that she starred in were turned into operas. I think her whole style was a very operatic style. So "Tosca," "Fédora," "Adrienne Lecouvreur," they're all plays that were, in fact, "Adrienne Lecouvreur" was originally written for Rachel, but they're all plays in which she starred. She was a great mistress of publicity, and as I said she loved playing the femme fatale, like pretending to be more sinister than she really was. And she let it be known that she slept in a coffin, and she invited journalists around to photograph her while she was having an afternoon nap, as you see on the left hand side. And so this jewellery that she actually wore, this, can you imagine the effect that you would create as a lady going to a grand reception, holding out your hand to have your fingers kissed wearing this. She was quite a gifted sculptor, and she made this self-portrait, which is actually an inkwell in bronze. I mean she modelled it and had it casted in bronze. So it's a portrait of her, and she's given herself rather sinister bat wings. And here she is in her studio, surrounded by skulls and skeletons, and she was up for any kind of stunt that would bring her publicity, and really dangerous ones, like going up in a balloon over Paris. And you can see that this was picked up even. And she had a book published with illustrations of her exploits in the balloon. You can see this is from The Times in 1879. And it says there has been published today a book, which it will certainly be the sensation of the Paris winter season, and here are illustrations of Sarah in the balloon.

And I'm really running out of time, and I've talked about Mucha, so perhaps I won't go into too much detail with this, but it was in 1896 that, over Christmas, she was in a new play and she needed a poster,

and they couldn't, everybody was away or on holiday, and they couldn't find an artist, and she decided to give a chance to the Czech artist, Alphonse Mucha. And this poster caused an absolute sensation. And then she realised that she was really onto a good thing with him, so she had a very close working relationship with Mucha from 1896 to the early 1900s. And he designed a whole series of posters in different plays for her. And she, as I said, she toured the world, she toured America several times. She had her own special train, there you see her in her train, yeah, there you got a telegram with her fight. She was pretty sharp woman when it came to finances. So she was certainly not somebody who was a good , despite the fact that she was a big spender, she certainly died a very rich woman. And here she is on her special train, the Madam Bernhardt Express. And I think I'm just going to finish by saying she made moving pictures.

She was really, and she made recordings, so we can actually hear the voice of Sarah Bernhardt, and I'm going to finish this talk with a monologue from "Phèdre," where you'll see this sing-song, operatic style for which she was so famous when she was travelling backwards and forwards across America in her train. She was doing one performance, you know, every night. Over a period of months she became very exhausted, and sometimes, of course, she was performing in French, and most of the American audiences in the middle of America, they weren't going to understand French, they were just responding to the raw emotion of her performance. And she would go into the monologue that I'm going to play you now. And sometimes she'd have memory lapses, and she covered up these very well. She would just go straight from Racine into a shopping list. But the shopping list was delivered with the same intensity of emotion, and nobody noticed that she was talking about groceries. So that was the voix d'or, the golden voice of Bernhardt.

So what have you got to say?

Q & A and Comments

Yes, Virginia, festival went very well, thank you. And I'm supposed to be doing a tour for Kirker to Munich it's now being postponed till next summer. Yes, it was Sarah Bernhardt who lost a leg and continued to perform. Oh. So yes, of course Delilah is, you're right. She's Philistine, she's not Jewish, even though she's in the Bible.

Q: Did this stereotype of Jewish women as more open with their favours apply to German and other European Jewish women?

A: I think it was particularly... No, I think it did actually, but I think it's a particularly, I mean the Wertheimers, of course, were not North African. They were Ashkenazi. So yes, I think the answer to that is yes it did.

"I'm not sure that Jewish women have the same reputation today of one of being a seductress."

I don't know. I wouldn't like to comment on that, really.

The famous La Païva, I think you, La Païva. P A I V A. Well Trudy has, yes, I think it is her number one favourite museum. It's the Gustave Moreau Museum in Paris. Wonderful, very atmospheric place to visit.

Q: What was the attraction of the older courtesans?

A: Well, people asked that about La Païva, with her handsome young lover. I don't know, maybe it's just reputation.

The name of the Offenbach film. It's quite difficult to get a hold of, it's called "La Valse de Paris."

Alfred de Musset. Thank you, François, yes, that was the name I was struggling to find, Alfred de Musset.

I have given a talk on Japanese prints. I've given that talk, and no doubt at some point it will come up again.

"What was her price?"

I don't know what her price was. "Did I freeze?" But I don't think I, I didn't give you the price, 'cause I didn't know it.

"An oedipal thing," maybe, yes. Jenny Lind was not Jewish, but she certainly had a thing about Jewish men. She, you know, repeatedly in her life showed that she had a very strong, she was very, very Christian, actually, but she had a very strong affinity for Jews.

Q: Was acting prostitution just a way for Jewish ladies to embrace the enlightenment?

A: Similar. That's a really interesting one. I'd have to really think about that. That's quite a complicated idea.

The pain after amputation is called phantom pain. Quite common on amputees.

Thank you Tanya. Thank you, Barry and Marne. Did I say that, "seduced?" No, no she didn't.

It wasn't Marcel Proust. It was the Comte de Montesquiou that she seduced to try and change his sexual preferences. Thank you very much.

"Anorexics like feeding people." That's interesting. "Are the," you

tell me. Ask Trudy, actually. I think are the 20th and 21st equivalents of... I must say, well from my experience, I've had such, you know, for the last 30 years, I've so enjoyed my involvement in the North London Jewish community. And I certainly find Jewish women of a certain age, I'm not talking in a sexual way, but I find them incredibly charming and seductive. I can really be a puddle on the floor for a delightful and charming Jewish lady of central European origin and a certain age.

A story that P.T. Barnum asked if he could display her leg and she replied, "Which one?" I don't know. It's a nice story.

"Did poster design..." Well Klimt of course made posters, and he was very influenced by Japanese prints. So it's a common thing rather than, yeah.

Thank you Miriam. And thank you very much, "Thanks so much for for bringing alive," Thank you. And yes, the portrait of Sarah Bernhardt's in the Petit Palais in Paris. You can always go and see that.

Yeah, Wallace Simpson. Yes. And Wallace Simpson doesn't, I don't think she had the, well, I suppose she had a certain intelligence, but she doesn't seem to have been a very charming or likeable woman. Unlike most of the women I talked about tonight, I would say, apart from La Païva, were extremely charming and appealing personalities. So that is it for tonight. And I'm so glad you didn't take everything I said the wrong way. And as I said, I'm talking about a particular stereotype of the 19th century. Well, that's what I've talking about. Thank you all very much. Byebye. See you next week.