

Dr. Pam Peled | Shakespeare's Women Angels or Devils

- Welcome back, everybody. Today I'm happy to welcome back Pam Peled, who will be talking about Shakespeare's woman, angels or devils. And I would just like to say that from, I'm going to just check here, from next week on Monday the 21st of December, Pam is going to start a course of five online lectures where she'll discuss Shakespeare's woman in greater detail. And after the lecture, Pam will give you more details about this course. Thanks so much. Over to you, Pam.

- Thank you, Wendy, thank you for having me back. It's very nice to be here. To everybody from in Israel. So, tonight we're going to talk, take a little look on Shakespeare's women, who were Shakespeare's women? Were they angels? Were they devils? And actually, more to the point, why do we care? What does it matter to us what Shakespeare thought about women? So I think that the most important thing to remember is that Shakespeare is such a cultural icon. If you've got an argument to make, and you can co-opt Shakespeare and say, even Shakespeare says, it really gives much more weight to your argument.

So for example, if you're an anti-Semite, and you want to... I'm just having a look at the chat, I'm sorry I can't answer the chat at the same time as any comments. I'll have to look at them at the end. So if you want to, for example, prove that if you are an anti-Semite and you want to prove that you are completely correct to be an anti-Semite, it's a very useful thing to say, even Shakespeare hated Jews. Look at that. And it's very easy to prove that he did. You can, for example, look at Macbeth, and you remember when the witches had their cauldron and they were stirring it, double, double toil and trouble, and they threw the most vile ingredients into this pot.

They threw in sweat from a hangman's brow and sweltered venom gut, put it all in the charmed pot, and into it among the hemlock and the bats wings and whatever, they threw liver of blaspheming Jew. And you can say, there you go, Shakespeare thought Jews were blasphemers. So, of course, he was an anti-Semite. And you can also say there's plenty of lines. For example, in "Two Gentlemen in Verona..." I think I have to digress here for a quick minute and just mention, did you all see that, I think the second person in England to get vaccinated against Corona was a man called William Shakespeare?

I wondered if everyone saw that. And so that sparked a flurry of media, of tweets and Twitters. For example, they said, two gentlemen with Corona and the taming of the flu after William Shakespeare got the corona injection. Anyway, in "Two Gentlemen of Verona," one servant says to another servant, "Come with me for a drink." And then he says, "You know what? "If you don't come with me for a drink, "then you're a Jew, a bloody Jew." Why? Why would he call him... He doesn't say a bloody Jew, he says a horrible Jew, or a heathen Jew, or something like that.

Why? So you can say, look, Shakespeare didn't miss an opportunity to talk about the terrible Jews. But on the other hand, if you are not an anti-Semite and you think that Jews are not

terrible people, you can use the same Shakespeare, and you can find a text in "The Merchant of Venice," for example, you can find Shylock's line, Shylock's speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes, "hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, passions." And you can read this, "If you prick us, "do we not bleed? "If you tickle us, do we not laugh?" Et cetera.

And you can say, how can you say that Shakespeare was an anti-Semite? Look, he believes Jews are just like anyone else. And so if you can co-opt Shakespeare to your agenda, you make your argument much more cogent. And the problem, or the beauty, with Shakespeare is that you can read him in so many different ways. So I use this as an example when we start to talk about women, because in the 21st century, as feminists and as people who believe that women should obviously be empowered, we like to say Shakespeare thought women were great. Shakespeare was an early modern feminist.

But in fairness, we have to say that there's, you can make the equally strong argument that Shakespeare didn't like women. But I'm going to leave that to someone else to do. And tonight, I hope that I'll prove to you that Shakespeare did think women were wonderful and should rule the world. So I'm going to go into my, into my PowerPoint. Shakespeare's Women: Devils or Angels? And why should we care? Now, this I want to show you, was the accepted wisdom of the day. Shakespeare was writing in a world where people said things like this, and not in a joke at all. "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, "the more you beat 'em, the better they be."

So you can imagine growing up in a world where this was how men treated women, "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, "the more you beat 'em, the better they be." Women had absolutely no rights in Shakespeare's time. Women, there was no divorce. If you wanted to divorce, I think you had to have an act of parliament to get you a divorce. So if your husband was beating you and abusing you, well, that's just how it was in those days. And, anyway, you couldn't get divorced, because women had no rights to property. So where were you going to live if you left your home? A woman was the property of her father.

And then when she got married she became the property of her husband. In the eyes of the law, when a woman and a, when a husband and a wife were married, they became one person, and that person was the husband. So an unmarried woman had absolutely no recourse. She couldn't make enough money to eat. Where would she live? She had no rights whatsoever. And so they were very much at the mercy of men. Shakespeare was writing in this climate. This is what people thought about women. And there were many, many plays on the Elizabethan stage showing how terrible women were.

They had one common theme, women were bad for men. If you married a woman, it wouldn't be long, said the plays of the day, it wouldn't be long before she was cheating on you, possibly with your best friend. Or if you married somebody, she would just spend all your money and you would be left penniless and scrounging for your own money. Or there was another play, many other plays that said, if you got married your woman would talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, 'til she drove you completely crazy, you wished you were dead.

So it wasn't looking very good for women. And Shakespeare had to enter this conversation. All playwrights of the day had to enter the conversation and say what they thought about those issues. So, Shakespeare came in with his very, very many and wonderful women characters. Did he like women? Didn't he like women? We'll have to see. So I just wanted to tell you one more thing about the beating of women. In those days, there was no law to say that you shouldn't beat your wife. And in fact, it was accepted that that's the way you should keep your wife in line. There's a sermon, unbelievable, as sounds to us, a sermon that was preached in a church in the 1600s, when Shakespeare was writing. We've got this sermon.

And it says a priest gets up on a Sunday and he tells his congregants, "You know what? "I think that for your own good, "you actually should not beat your wife, "because if you hit her and you hurt her, "then she'll serve you your meal with a sullen face. "And you don't want your wife "to give you your food with a sullen face. "You want her to smile "when she puts the food that she's cooked "in front of your face." So he said, "I think I suggest that you don't beat your wives, "but if you have to, then beat them." So this is where Shakespeare came into this kind of attitude towards women. So I'll just show you.

This is what Aristotle said centuries before about the difference between men and women. He says, "In all genera in which "the distinction of male and female is found, "nature makes a similar differentiation "in the mental characteristics of the sexes." We've got different mental characteristics. "The differentiation is the most obvious "in the case of humankind and in that of the larger animals. "The female is less spirited than the male, "softer in disposition, more mischievous, "less simple, more impulsive, "more attentive to the nurture of the young.

"The male, on the other hand, "is more spirited than the female, more savage, "more simple, and less cunning. "The nature of man is most rounded off and complete, "and consequently, in man, "the qualities or capacities are found in their perfection." Men are perfect. "Hence woman is more compassionate than man, "more easily moved to tears, "at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, "more apt to scold and to strike." I think we can take issue with all these things. Are we more jealous? More querulous? But certainly, I don't think women is more apt to strike than a man is. "She is, furthermore, more prone to despondency."

think that's also the jury is very out, and I actually think it's wrong. "And less hopeful than the man, "more void of shame or self-respect, "more false of speech, "more deceptive, and of more retentive memory. "She is also more wakeful, more shrinking, "more difficult to rouse to action." And here's the best one. "She requires a smaller quantity of nutriment." You can feed her less food and she'll be happy. So you can see that they didn't have a very high opinion of women. Women were all the bad things. And you got involved with the women and your life was downhill all the way.

So Shakespeare had to come and put his players on the stage where people were saying all these terrible things about women, and make his own statements. So what did he say? First of

all, I wanted to talk about the difference between... There was this argument about nurture versus nature. And people were really involved in the question, why are women such pathetic human beings? Why can't they do anything? Why are they so useless in society? And there were two opinions. One of them said it was nature. Women are by nature just inherently useless. No matter what opportunities you give us, we just won't be able to cope.

We are querulous and more apt to scold and strike and jealous and despondent and useless. Tired and useless. And that's just the way it is. And other people said, no, it's not nature, it's nurture. Women are not given any tools. How can they fly? They don't know how to read. They can't work. They can't do anything. They're just the property of their husband. But if you actually give them the opportunity, will they be able to cope in a man's world? And this is where Shakespeare becomes so fabulous and so fascinating, because he has 12 cross-dressing women in many of his plays. And in my series, I'm going to look at this in great detail.

He has women who put on men's clothes, and the minute they wear the pants, they just shine. It's an amazing thing to see. Now, we remember that in Shakespeare's day, women were actually not allowed to act on the stage. There was no such thing as a woman actress. Women's parts were played by young boys, and they were, they acted women until their voices broke. So until they were about 12 or 13. And that's a very interesting point, because unless you absolutely needed a woman's part, the women were written out of the plays.

Most characters don't have mothers, for example, unless they absolutely have to for the plot. "King Lear," for example, doesn't have a wife. So, in some of the plays, these young boys who were dressed as women then take off their dresses and slip into something more comfortable, become men, but they're actually women, and they just run the show. They get the men out of trouble, they flourish, they think on their feet. They are fantastic. And I think this is a hint to what Shakespeare really thought about women. He's saying, just give them the opportunity, and they will run the world. Let's have a look. Go back to my... I'll go back to my PowerPoint.

So we're going to have a look in detail at a few of these women, and we're going to see what Shakespeare was saying about each one. So first of all, Kate in "The Taming of the Shrew." Now "The Taming of the Shrew" is supposed to be a comedy, right? But actually it's not a comedy whatsoever. It's about Kate. Kate is a young woman who lives with her father and her sister. Again, they don't have a mother. Kate lives with her father, Baptista, and her sister Bianca in a town in Italy called Padua. And Bianca, Bianca of course, means white, and Bianca is this blonde-haired, beautiful, sexy, good, everything woman.

And the whole town wants to marry Bianca. And Kate is a shrew. Actually in the movie Kate is Elizabeth Taylor and Petruchio, her suitor and then her husband, is Richard Burton. And the sparks fly, and she's definitely much more beautiful than Bianca, but she's supposed to be a shrew. And the whole question here, nobody's allowed to marry Bianca, the younger daughter, unless someone first marries Kate, and nobody's prepared to marry Kate. Kate is wild, and she's just a nasty piece of work. Nobody wants to go close to her.

And so the town is in turmoil, because there are about 10 different men who are aching to marry Bianca, and all of them are trying to plot a way to find how they can marry her. And then into town rides Petruchio. Petruchio is Richard Burton. Petruchio is a young man, an absolute... Buh, he's a big slob, and all he's interested in is marrying money. And he says, "I don't care at all what she looks like. "I don't care how she behaves. "Is she rich? "I'll marry her." So she's rich. Everybody's very, very happy that Petruchio will take Kate off her father's hands, and so Bianca will be free to get married, and he marries her for her money.

He kind of coerces her into getting married. She really doesn't want to. We're going to look at this in detail in my course. But she has actually no choice, because if she doesn't get married, what is she going to do for the rest of her life? She can't get a career. So she marries him, and the rest of the play is an absolute war of wits, a war between the sexes, and Shakespeare is clearly saying that when you get married, who tames who? How does the power struggle between husband and wife resolve itself? And Petruchio uses very terrible- Very terrible means to tame his wife, first of all he kind verbally abuses her.

He says, "I'm the boss, you do what I say." Then he starves her. They come home and she's tired. They come home from the wedding. He hasn't allowed her to eat at her own wedding. He brings her home, she's tired, she's hungry, he doesn't let her eat. He makes a big fuss that the food's not good enough for her. He turns over the table, all the foods eaten by the dogs, and he sends her up, he says, "Come on, let's go to sleep." And she's hungry. And then comes the wedding night scene. And he, again, he's not very gentle and loving to her, but she doesn't allow him into her bed. And he's furious about this.

And so for the next week, they fight with each other. I don't want to tell you the whole story because we'll do it in detail, but he really tries to tame her. But there's one particularly groundbreaking and outstanding line in this play. At one point, Petruchio says to Kate, "I swear I'll cuff you if you do that again. "I swear I'll hit you." And she turns to him and she says, "If you strike me, you are no gentleman." "If you strike me, you are no gentleman." And I've just told you that everybody hit their wives. Even priests said from the pulpit in the church, "It's okay to hit your wife."

And suddenly comes a play on the the stage, and I have this vision of Elizabethan women turning to their husbands who probably hit them the day before and nudging them in the ribs and saying, "Did you hear that? "Did you hear that? "If you strike me, you are no gentleman." And I think that that's the turning point. Or it could be a turning point in the awareness of against violence to women. If you strike someone, you are no gentleman. And I think that just for that line alone, Shakespeare's the greatest genius that ever lived. And the most important. It's the most groundbreaking one.

Where did he get it from? How did he think to write something like this in an age where everybody thought hitting your wife was a completely fine thing to do? So that's Kate. And she

really... She has an important part to play in Shakespeare's take on women. The next woman that I want to look at is Desdemona in "Othello." Desdemona, the beautiful Desdemona, who marries the big Black Moor. Now, you remember that Othello was a general in the Venetian army. He'd risen to prominence, which was very amazing because he was Black.

And this was a very unusual thing. And at a later stage, I'd like to have a look at Shakespeare's take on racism and gender, which I think is also groundbreaking and amazing, but we won't do that tonight. Anyway, Othello has risen to prominence in the Venetian army, and he marries Desdemona, who is the daughter of Brabantio, a very important man living in Venice. Brabantio loves Othello, but he doesn't love him enough for him to allow a Black man to marry his snow white blonde daughter. And he's really, really upset about the whole... They elope because they know they've got no chance in hell to get married with the blessing of the father.

So they elope, and he is just furious about this, the father. In the meanwhile, Othello has got a second in command called Iago, and Iago expects to become Othello's deputy. But for some reason, Othello passes over Iago and appoints Michael Cassio to be his deputy. And from that minute on, Iago is determined to ruin Othello's life to the extent that he's happy to get him killed and also to kill Desdemona. He doesn't care. He's so furious and angry that he isn't the deputy, he'll do anything to get his revenge. And the rest of the play is the most chilling portrait of a wicked man, Iago, dripping poison in Othello's ear and making Othello believe that his wife is being unfaithful to him. Desdemona has not got one unfaithful bone in her body.

She adores her husband. Adores. She would die for him in a nanosecond. But every time Iago just knows how to play on a fellow's emotions. And every time he sees Desdemona with Michael Cassio says, "Did you see that? "Did you see how she left him?" And slowly, slowly he poisons Othello's mind to believe that Desdemona is having an affair with Michael Cassio. There's lots of plot twists. Iago gets Michael Cassio drunk, and he gets him demoted. And then he tells Desdemona to try and get him reinstated. And every time Desdemona says to her husband, "Why don't you reinstate Michael Cassio?"

Iago says, "Why is she saying that? "Because she ". And it goes on and on and on. And more than anything else, the play is an absolutely excruciating look at women as a victim. Because as Othello becomes crazy, literally crazy with jealousy... This is the play where beware the green eyed monster of jealousy comes from. So Othello becomes completely deranged with jealousy. And the more and more jealous he becomes, the more he abuses his wife.

And he starts off abusing her verbally. And he says to her, he says terrible things to her. He's rude to her in company. And she reacts by saying to her maid, "Amelia, what's wrong with me? "What's wrong with me? "Why is my husband so cross with me?" And Amelia says to her, "Madam, "it's your husband who's to blame. "Your husband is an idiot. "Your husband is a jealous bastard." And Desdemona says, "My husband is perfect. "There's something wrong with me." And it goes from bad to worse. And Desdemona gets more and more desperate and more and more eager to please her husband, and at the end, when she sees... He tricks her.

Iago tricks her into losing a handkerchief that Othello gave her, and he plants it in Michael Cassio's room, because Othello says, "I need proof, I need proof, 'ocular proof.'" And there can't be any proof because nothing's happening. But Iago manages to manipulate a whole story, and he gets this handkerchief, and he says, "Here's the proof she was in Michael Cassio's room." And Othello comes home one night, and Desdemona knows that he is just furious with her. And he comes home. And just before he gets home, Desdemona says to her maid, "You know what? 'I can see my husband hates me, 'and I just don't know what I've done. 'What have I done?"

So Amelia says to her, "You've done nothing, madam." So she says, "Why is he upset? 'Who could ever cheat on their husband?" So Amelia says, "You know, there are women 'who do cheat on their husbands." So Desdemona says, "Really? 'Well why would they do such a thing?" So Amelia says, "Sometimes for money. 'Sometimes the other man's got more money. But Desdemona says, "I wouldn't do it for all the money in the world. 'I can't even imagine such a thing." So Amelia says, "Well, some women do it. 'You're not one of them."

So Desdemona says to her, maid, "Listen, 'the only way that I can get my husband to love me again 'is if I seduce him back into loving me." And she says, "Please get the wedding sheets 'that I used on my wedding night 'and put them on my bed and give me my night dress 'that I wore on our wedding night, 'and I'll have to try and seduce him back into loving me. 'It's the only tool, 'the only recourse that I have at this stage." So she goes to sleep in her wedding outfit, and on her silk wedding sheets.

And Othello comes in deranged with jealousy, and he loves his wife passionately. And he sees her lying there asleep, and he comes to the bed and he wakes her up, and he says to her, "Desdemona, prepare to die." And she says, "To die?" And he says, "The pity of it, Desdemona. 'The pity of it. 'You look so beautiful and you look so innocent." And she says, "But my Lord, what have I done?" And he says, "You know what you've done?" And she says, "I don't." And he says, "Prepare to die." She says, "Kill me in the morning. 'Don't kill me now."

And he takes a pillow and he smothers her to death without a second thought. And she dies. And a minute after she dies, in comes Amelia, who knows the true story, who knows about the handkerchief, because her husband's the one who put it in the room. And Amelia comes in and she says, "What has happened? 'What's going on here?" And this is the worst part of the play. Desdemona wakes up, and she says, from the dead, and she says to Amelia, "If anybody asks who did this to me, 'the answer is nobody. 'I did it to myself. 'Commend me to my dear Lord," and she dies again.

And if this isn't a chilling portrait of an abused woman who thinks that she's guilty, that she's the reason that her husband's abusing her, even after he kills her, she just comes back for a minute from the dead to say, "It's all my fault. 'He's wonderful." And I think in the end, obviously, the truth comes out and Othello has to kill himself, and Iago gets killed, and Amelia gets killed. And it's the usual dramatic ending to the play. But I think that this has a very, very serious message,

this play, that in contradiction to the other plays on the Elizabethan stage where women really were having affairs and really were cheating on their husbands, in this play, Shakespeare is clearly making a statement. Women are good and women should be trusted. And it's the men that are idiots, that cast dispersions on their wives.

Of course, there are lots of other plays with lots of other kinds of women. Let's just look at another woman here. So in "King Lear" we have three daughters. We have Cordelia, Regan, and Goneril. And here we can see within one play, different women. Cordelia, of course, is another angel. Her father kicks her out. You remember "King Lear" is about the king of England who wants to divide his land up between his three daughters. And he doesn't want to be bothered with being a king anymore. He's 80 years old. He wants to crawl towards his death being looked after for three months, three months, three months, by each of his daughters.

And all he wants is for his daughters to tell him how much they love him. And after they tell him how much he loves him, he'll give them a part of England, which he's already decided before, and spend the last years of his life with his daughters. Cordelia adores her father. She's not prepared to lie and to flatter him and to play a part. She says, "You know how much I love you. I'm not going through this charade." He banishes her to France, and he divides England into two, and he gives England to his two daughters, Goneril and Regan. And from the very second that he gives them his land, these two women make him crazy.

They just, they don't want him, they don't want his servants. They put him out in the rain. They abuse his friends. They just want him dead and they want England for themselves. They don't want to be bothered with their father. And Cordelia, through it all, no matter how he's treated her, just lives to help her father and to come back to England, where of course she eventually dies. So within the one play, it's very difficult to say, what does Shakespeare think about women? Does he like them? Does he not like them? And that's what I'm saying. You can find your own agenda in anything. So that's the three women in "King Lear."

And then we come to Lady Macbeth. Wonderful and terrible Lady Macbeth. So I want to look for a few minutes at Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is actually the power behind "Macbeth." At the beginning of the play, she and her husband have the most fantastic relationship. He calls her "My dearest partner in greatness." Lady Macbeth and her husband are as close as close can be. And when he hears from the witches that he's about to become king, he sends a messenger to Lady Macbeth to tell her with a letter to say, "I couldn't wait to tell you, "my dearest part named greatness, "of the wonderful things that lie ahead for you and for me."

And he tells her, "The witches said "that I am going to be the King of Scotland." And Lady Macbeth springs into action and she says, "I'm worried because you would love to be king, "but you are without the evil, "you're not evil enough to kill the king. "Hie, thee hither, come to me, "and I will pour my spirits in your ear. "I will make you evil. "I will tell you how to kill the king." So we can look at this, and this is what is very fascinating. We can look at this and say Lady Macbeth is a complete devil. She is the reason. She's got no compunctions. She just says we

must be Machiavellian. We must do whatever it takes in order to achieve our aims. But if we look carefully at her speech, Lady Macbeth's speech, okay?

Lady Macbeth is waiting for her husband to come home. She's waiting for her husband to come home, and she is going to inspire him, she's going to incite him to kill the king. And before she does this, she says, "Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts. "Unsex me here." What does she mean by this? She's calling the evil spirits, and she says, "Unsex me here." Why does she want to be unsexed? "And fill me from the crown to the toe "top-full of direst cruelty. "Make me evil." Now there's an argument to be made that Shakespeare, by this, is saying a woman can't be so evil. In order to become so evil, she has to be unsexed. "Unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe "top-full of direst cruelty. "Make thick my blood.

"Stop up the access and passage to remorse." Remember, from the Greek thinkers that I showed you, they said women were more tender and merciful, and she says, "I am a woman. "So stop me from having these womanly feelings, "that no compunctious visitings of nature "shake my full purpose." Now visitings of nature could be that by the nature of women, I'm just too goodhearted, and I'll never be able to go through with it. But visitings of nature was also Elizabethan slang for women menstruating.

And she's actually saying, "Stop me from physically being a woman. "Stop me from being a menstruating woman. "That no compunctious visitings of nature "shake my full purpose nor keep peace "between the effect and it. "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall." She says a woman is usually nurturing. We feed our babies with our milk. She says take away my normal womanly characteristics and turn me, unsex, me, abrogate my femininity, and don't turn me into a man, just turn me into a non-woman who is capable of this evil. "You murdering ministers "wherever in your sightless substances "you wait on nature's mischief. "Come, thick night, and pall thee "in the dunkest smoke of hell, "that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, "nor heaven peeped through the blanket "of the dark to cry, "Hold, hold."

So she says, I want to do this evil, but I can't do it if I'm a woman. Take away my femininity and then I'll be able to be evil. And you can say that Shakespeare by this, you can easily say, look at Lady Macbeth, she's a terrible devil woman. But if you read it carefully, you can say the exact opposite. And you can say, look at Lady Macbeth. She couldn't be cruel while she was a woman. She had to be unsexed. When it comes to Lady Macbeth doesn't kill the king, even though she says my keen knife. She leaves that to Macbeth.

She says, "I came to do it "and he looked too much like my daddy. "Had he not resembled my father, as he lays sleeping there, "I would've done it." She's a woman. She can't do it because she's not evil enough. And in the end, she, of course, goes nuts and commits suicide. So you can see that you can easily, easily spin this character both ways. Either that she's evil and a woman, or that as a woman she can't be evil. She first has to become unsexed. I'll show you this lovely clip.

Video clip plays.

- [Lady Macbeth] The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements. Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts. Unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood. Stop up the access and passage to remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature shake my fell purpose.

- This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses.

- That's, I'm not sure if you can hear me, but that's the King Duncan, the night before he's killed. The night that he is killed. Comes to the castle and he says it's got a gentle seat. It's beautiful. The play is very much about the difference between appearance and reality. Lady MacBeth's watching the king.

- [Lady Macbeth] Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunkest smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, to cry "Hold, hold."

- And she greets the king with all smiles and sweetness.

- Fair and noble, hostess. We are your guest tonight.

- Your servant, ever.

- That's her husband, Macbeth. And the king's sons.

- Give me your hand. Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly and shall continue our dresses towards him.

- That was the Polanski movie, by the way, of "Macbeth." And it was made just after his wife Sharon Stone was murdered so brutally, you remember, and this movie examines the cruelty of man to man. It was a reaction to what Polanski himself was going through at the time. So you can see it's very easy to make a case both ways. And it's very, very interesting to look at Shakespeare's take on women. I want to say that this whole subject of what is a woman? And is a woman equal to a man? You'd think that by this stage in our world we'd be over this, and we wouldn't even be discussing it anymore.

But I don't know if you remember, only a very few years ago, what could it have been, 10, 12 years ago, maybe 15 years ago, Larry Summers, he was the dean of Harvard, and Larry Summers made the statement, maybe it was 20 years ago, he made the statement that he would prefer to hire men professors of maths and science, to teach at Harvard, because he thinks that they have a better brain for the sciences. And I don't know if you remember the

outcry that that caused. I think it was on the cover of Time Magazine and many Nobel Prize winners, women from the sciences came forward, and there were cartoons. And I actually think that he had to resign over that, there was such a fuss. And in his defence, Larry Summers said that he had two little girls at the time. They were about two and a half. I think they were twins. And he said he and his wife were bringing them up completely, without any preconceptions, sort of gender neutral.

They didn't give them dolls. They gave them any toys that boys and girls could have. They didn't dress them in pink. They wanted them to be completely equal to men in the world. And one day when the little kids were about two and a half, Larry Summers came into his lounge, and he saw his two little girls playing with cars and trucks. And the one little girl was saying to the other little girl, "This is the daddy truck and this is the mommy truck, "and they're going to take the baby truck "from the nursery school." And so he said to himself, I might as well give them dolls. There is a difference between men and women.

So this whole issue about what is the difference? Is it just biology? Is it more... It still is something that we very, very much talk about even today, of course. And it's very interesting to see the history of how people spoke about it before. Now, I want to show you the last thing that we're going to look at for today, and then I'll take some questions. Oh. I want to get past that. Just get back to the plays. Okay, "The Taming of the Shrew." So I told you about Kate, and I told you about Petruchio. And Petruchio comes to marry Kate just to marry money.

And after he's married her, I told you we see the whole battle between the husband and wife and who tames who. Now I want to show you this one little scene where Petruchio is saying to his friend, Hortensio, "Whatever she is, I'm going to marry her." "Signior Hortensio, 'twixt such friends as we "few words suffice." I don't have to talk to you a long time. "And therefore, if thou no one rich enough "to be Petruchio's wife, "as wealth is burden of my wooing dance." That's the only thing I'm worried about. Wealth is the reason that I'm wooing someone to marry. And then he takes three famous women. He says, "Be she as foul as was Florentius' love..." Now Florentius was a knight in King Arthur's, around King Arthur's table.

And Florentius had raped somebody and had been sentenced to death. And when Florentius was... Let's just stop this. When Florentius was sentenced to death, Guinevere, the queen took pity on him. And she said, "You know what? "He made a terrible mistake, "but let's give him a second chance. "Let's give him a year, "and if he can find out what women really want in life, "we'll save his life." So for one year this knight went round and round the world asking every woman what, and asking everybody he could, "What do women really want?"

"What do women really want?" And he couldn't find the answer. And the day that he was supposed to die, he came upon an old hag, a really ugly, shrivelled, wrinkled woman, and she said, "Why are you looking so sad?" And he said, "I need to find out in another hour "what women really want or I die." And she said to him, "I'll tell you what women really want, "but then you have to marry me." So he said, "What have I got to lose? "I'm going to die anyway."

So she told him, "Women really want to be the boss. "Women want mastery." And he came and he told King Arthur and the Queen, and Guinevere said, "That's right. "You are saved." And the old hag popped up and said, "What time are we getting married?" What could he do? He begged and pleaded. He had to marry her. And that night they got into bed on their wedding night, and he was absolutely crying. He was just finished. And his wife said to him, "Listen, I'll give you a choice. "I can either be like I am, old haggard, revolting, "but I'll be true to you and I'll love you forever, "or I can become pretty and sexy and gorgeous and young, "but I'll lead you a merry dance, "and you won't be happy with me. "Which do you prefer?"

And Florentius said to her, "You know what, wife? "You decide." And she said, "That's what I wanted to hear. "You've made me the boss in this marriage." And she became a young, beautiful, sexy, charming woman who was true to him and made his life sweet. So that's the person that Petruchio references when he says, "Even if she's as foul as Florentius' wife was..." Of course, before she turned into a beautiful woman. "As old as Sibyl." Sibyl is from Greek mythology. Her great wish was to be never to die, but she forgot to ask to stay young.

So they granted her her wish, and she never died, but she got so old and so old that she wished she could die. "And as curst and shrewd as Socrates' Xanthippe..." That's Socrates' wife, who was known to be very, very shrewish. "Or at worst, she moves me not." If I don't feel a thing for her. "Or not removes, at least, affection's edge in me." I don't care. I don't care if I like her. I don't care if I don't like her. "Were she as rough as the swelling Adriatic seas, "I come to wive it willfully in Padua. "If wealthily, then happily in Padua." So we can see another great function of women. They were there to bring their husband's wealth if they came from a rich family.

And that's all. After that, what he did with her, if he was good to her, not good to her, it didn't matter at all. She just was fulfilling the function of bringing him some money. Now, I'd like to show you a tiny little clip of that, of Petruchio meeting Kate. I'm not going to tell you all the background to this. I'm going to show you a minute or two, because this is what I'm going to do in my next course in great detail. I just want to give you a peep. A peak at what we're going to be doing in the course. Sorry. Hmm. Finding the video.

Video clip plays.

That's Petruchio. I'm not sure if you could see that, but that's beginning of Petruchio meeting Kate, and starting right from at first glance to fight with her. In the next course I'll show you that in great detail. But now I want to look at my questions, and I believe, I'm just having a look at what you've written to me.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Okay, so the first question is about Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Elizabeth was on the throne for part of the time that Shakespeare was writing. And did this influence the way he portrayed

women?

A: Of course we can't be sure. Queen Elizabeth herself was not great for women. She said about herself that she was a man in a woman's body. She actually didn't think of herself as a powerful woman. She thought of herself as a kind of a man figure. She didn't surround herself with women advisors at all.

She was jealous of the women in her court. She wasn't good to them. And I don't think that she actually forwarded the status of women in any way. In fact, the opposite. So that's for her. "Does it matter if Shakespeare likes women?" "But perhaps he does understand them?" I hope I've answered that.

Q: "At the end of "The Shrew" she becomes subservient," says one question. "How can a modern theatrical director deal with that?"

A: Okay, so that's a brilliant question. I, myself, don't think she becomes subservient at the end. I think there's a way of reading the play and the way Zeffirelli directs it in his movie is that that's the whole point, who tames who?

And in my course that I'm starting next week, that's exactly what I'm going to be talking about. Again, it's completely dependent on how this play is directed. If you want to direct it, that in the end, Petruchio tames his wife and she's smashed into submission and she makes the speech of pure adoration to her husband, abrogating all her rights, it's easy to portray it like that. I think there's a nicer way of portraying it that she's actually manipulating him, totally. And not only manipulating him, but they actually fall in love with each other and they have a good relationship in the end. Maybe that's just what I want to see in the play, but that's certainly what I do see. Let's have a look at other questions.

Q: "What is your opinion of actors gender swapping "in Shakespeare's plays, eg, in 'The Taming of the Shrew?'"

A: I'm not sure, Valerie. I'm not sure that I understand that question. I think you're probably talking about cross-dressing, and I think that that's a very, very important part of Shakespeare's message about women. And I think I try to sort of deal with that. When a woman, for example, when Porsche puts on the pants in "The Merchant of Venice" and she goes to the court, she saves the day. She saves Antonio's life.

She saves her husband's friend. She saves everything. She saves the money. She's the cleverest. She has the best legal brain, and I think that's what Shakespeare does by his cross-dressing characters. I'll have a look. "I think it's fantastic how faithfully "'Kiss Me Kate' caught the tone." Okay, that is...

Q: Someone asks me, "Who is my favourite Shakespeare woman?"

A: I don't think that I could answer that question. I like a lot of Shakespeare's characters. I'm not sure that it matters who my favourite one is, but I think we can all find things to relate to, even for today, in many of Shakespeare's characters.

Q: Oh, this is a good question from Ronnie Gotkin. It's "There are good women and bad women in Shakespeare, "as there are good men and bad ones. "Could one not ask just as legitimately "how does Shakespeare portray men?"

A: And I think you could ask just ask legitimately, and we could definitely speak about that for weeks. Definitely. "Although Shakespeare attempted a different take "for man to be a gentleman, as you said, "this went against convention of the time.

Q: "Did audiences of the time take him seriously? "Or did they..."

A: Oh, well who knows? But the question was that when Shakespeare said a line like, "If you strike me, you are no gentleman," did audiences take him seriously? How can we know? But I think that if I was a woman in Shakespeare's play, I would certainly have taken a line like that seriously. Wouldn't you? If you had been standing there and you'd been witness to abuse? I think I certainly would've.

So, with that, I'd like to thank Wendy again for giving me this opportunity to speak to this lovely forum.

- Thank you, Pam. That is wonderful. I just want to reiterate that Pam will be starting her seminars next week, and that we will send out an email to all of you who are interested, in case you'd like to sign up. Pam, where will they be able to get details? We will send them, but can you want to share it with us now as well?

- Yeah, yeah, on my Facebook page, which is Pamela Peled, if they can either, you can send me a request to be a friend if you like, and then you'll see all the updates of everything that I do. Or you can just go into my Facebook page, and it's there already. There's a Google Docs link, and you just have to go into press the Google Docs link and sign up, register. And then we will send you an email giving you the link and giving you all the details of the lectures. They're five upcoming lectures, and I hope to keep them going for as, on Shakespeare and other things in literature, too.

- So will you be doing other seminars next year, in the new year? Would you be doing poetry and the drama?

- Yeah, I'm hoping that people... I'm happy to do feminist literature and whatever, drama, modern, Virginia Woolf, Chaucer, you know? Whatever there's a demand for.

- So would you like people to send you emails requesting-
- There's a Google Docs form on my Facebook.
- Fine, okay.
- I can send the link in the chat. Would you like me to?
- Do that, yeah. Do that now while we are all here.
- Okay. I'm going to just... I think I have to... My daughter's coming to help me do that. It's in my email. I'm just going into my email, and I'll send you the link. I'll put it in the chat. Here it is. There's the link. Okay, I've got the link. I'm just copying it to put in the chat.
- Okay, great. Pops up.
- [Pam] No, not .
- "What should those of us do who don't do Facebook?" We will send you the details. Judy will send them to you sometime this week. Just watch out for them.
- There's the link. There's the link. You can see it. So if anyone wants to go into that link, and then you'll send an email and we'll send you all the details.
- Is the link on?
- Yeah, it's on the chat.
- It's on the chat. Well, I can't see it. Can the others see it, I wonder? Okay, yes, I see it now, sorry. Absolutely. All right, thanks, Pam.
- So what I hope to do, what I hope to do is start with the Shakespeare, and then after that open up to requests for whatever people want. Any kind of...
- Great, all right, thank you very much. I believe it's nighttime there. What's the time in Israel?
- 10 O'clock. Just 10 o'clock.
- Just 10 o'clock. Okay, great.
- On a rainy night.
- Oh my goodness. I think it's raining in London, and it's raining in New York. It's pretty

miserable. So, thank you very much for the inspiring presentation.

- Thank you. Thanks a lot, Wendy for-

- Good night, everybody, and goodbye. Thanks-