

Shakespeare

Top Dog

Shaheen Khan

The joy of Shakespeare

I was born in East Africa and I came over here when I was eleven. And so a lot of my upbringing has been here. I wasn't great at English which is a huge regret for me actually. But in a way it sort of doesn't matter because, you know, in my fifties I got to play Lady Macbeth. And it opened a world to me that I hadn't even known was there. The thing is, Shakespeare is a genius for a reason. I had never realised his brilliance. I had always thought it was for other people, clever people, intellectual people. But actually, when I started sort of deconstructing it in a way, you realise it's for everybody. It's for a white person, a black person, anybody. It's universal. The themes, you know, love, greed, ambition, power, all those things are just normal daily things in humans' lives. You know, in all our lives. Across cultures. Across time and space Shakespeare just ... And I think that's why he's so relevant, is because his writings of like over 400 years ago resonate so deeply today.

Shakespeare's language in everyday English

Myself, when I was reading *Macbeth*, you know, we all know certain of Macbeth's lines. I know there are like so many of them in the English language. But for me what was so thrilling was when I started reading *Macbeth* I was like, 'Oh, "Be all and end all", that's from here!' you know? And so when I now go and see a Shakespeare, I don't know how other people feel, but I know I get a real thrill when those words that I use today connect me back to his time. It's like, wow. That's thrilling. You know, 'The world is my oyster' or ... I mean, I can't think, there are so many that we use every day. He's just so clever.

How does Lady Macbeth get what she wants?

For Lady Macbeth it's quite clear what Macbeth needs to do. For the witches' predictions to come true he needs to basically get rid of King Duncan, otherwise how else is he going to become king? And so for her it's really important that Macbeth, you know, actively does something. But she realises that he's too weak. She is the strong one in this relationship, certainly at the beginning of the play. She's the one who's, you know, powering the change in him. She's manipulating him. She wants him to become the king so she persuades him to do these things. And she uses her sexuality. She also, you know, she questions his manhood. So she kind of propels him with this manipulation and putting him down slightly, that he's not man enough. So he can then go on and get what she wants for herself as well. Which is, she wants to be top dog too.