HUMANITIES INSTITUTE.
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Pericles, Prince of Tyre 1607-8

Shakespeare (and George Wilkins).

Overview.

After much scholarly disagreement, there is a consensus that William Shakespeare wrote *the second half of the present play*, from ll. 827 to the end; the main portion of the play after scene 9, following the story of Pericles and Marina. Shakespeare's collaborator, in writing the play, was George Wilkins, a part time writer, a victualler, pandar, dramatist, and pamphleteer. From this point of view, Shakespeare declined to write the first act or two of the play, but wrote only the latter half—which, by general agreement is the finest material in the play. After all of which, finally, must be added that in one major edition of the play, by the Cambridge University Press, it is maintained in great detail that Shakespeare wrote the entire play, and that the seeming oddities in style are the result of conscious archaizing on Shakespeare's part.

Characters

Antiochus; King of Antioch
Pericles; Prince of Tyre
Helicanus and Escanes; two lords of Tyre
Simonides; King of Pentapolis
Cleon; governor of Tarsus
Lysimachus; governor of Mytilene
Thaliard; a lord of Antioch
Cerimon; a lord of Ephesus
Philemon; servant of Cerimon
Leonine; servant of Dionyza
Marshal
A Pandar
Boult; the pandar's servant
The daughter of Antiochus
Dionyza; wife of Cleon
Thaissa; daughter of Simonides, wife of Pericles
Marina; daughter of Pericles and Thaissa
Lychorida; nurse of Marina
A bawd
Diana
Gower as Chorus

Story.

Antiochus. The play opens in the court of King Antiochus of Antioch and from that point on, with Pericles the leading figure, makes its way among and around several courtly venues and ports of the eastern Mediterranean—notably Antioch, Tyre, Tarsus, Pentapolis—in a flight initially impelled by the vengeance of King Antiochus, which pursues Pericles from one stop to another.

Riddle. The initial court scene, with King Antiochus, is driven by a riddle. Antiochus promises to give his beautiful daughter in marriage to any noble suitor who can answer the following riddle:

I am no Viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed:
I sought a husband, in which labour,

I found that kindness in a father;
He's father, son, and husband mild,
I mother, wife; and yet his child:
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live resolve it you.

Pericles arrives at court, determined to undertake the challenge of the riddle. (The modern reader has to ask: who *is* this Pericles, what is his mission in life, but will be answered that Pericles is a figure from tale and in the end myth, as he unites in spirit with the goddess Diana.).

Sinister. He quickly realizes that the riddle is not innocent. The dark answer to it is that King Antiochus and his daughter are In an incestuous relationship, with a bitter sting in its tail: if Pericles solves the riddle, he will be killed by the King, but if he fails to solve the riddle he will, as the last line states it, be put to death. No way out. The King gives Pericles forty days to come up with an answer, but he need hardly have spoken to this matter; Pericles flees immediately, back to the court of Tyre.

Flight. In Tyre, Helicanus, the chief ally and advisor to Pericles, urges Pericles to keep going, pursued as he now will be by the hired assassins of King Antiochus. From this point Pericles begins his almost mythical *periplous* of the eastern Mediterrnean. He sails first to Tarsus, which is caught in the grips of a famine, and whose two rulers, Cleon and Dionyza, owe him gratitude for bailing out their people with grain supplies. Pericles, still in flight, continues to Pentapolis, another coastal city where this time he encounters a collection of fishermen, who are just pulling in, from their nets, a set of sea worn battle armor, which coincidentally proves to be that of Pericles himself, washed overboard in one of his sea journeys.

Contest. Remarkably, this discovery occurs on the day before an armed contest for the hand of the daughter of the royal family, Thaissa, who chooses Pericles as her mate. The two marry, Thaissa gives birth to Marina, and they start back to Tyre. En route, there is another terrible storm—one gets glimpses of a latter day Odysseus here; a whiff of that coastal self-discovery that opens T*welfth Night* —Thaissa dies and is buried at sea, and Marina is separated from her father. (Thaissa's casket is subsequently recovered from the sea, she is revived by a lord of Ephesus, Cerimon, and is given a role as priestess of Diana in the local shrine, where she will once again, at play's end, be rejoined by her husband.) Separated from his daughter, his wife putatively drowned, Pericles returns to Tyre.

Reunited. Marina, who has been left with Cleon and Dionyza, goes through the wringer of experience, is nearly taken up into prostitution, and, thanks to the hatred of Dionyza, nearly killed by a hired assassin. The finale of this play, which has evoked scorn from critics like Ben Jonson, and, in the prolonged recognition scene, in which Marina and her father are reunited, the high admiration of T.S.Eliot, the finale is near, which, predictably, will reunite Pericles with both his daughter and his wife, Thaissa, the priestess of Diana.

Themes

The picaresque. The culture world of Rabelais, Cervantes or Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus*, early modern Europe testing out new styles of literature, with intrepid adventures, rich coincidences, bravado humor and pathos mixed; this culture world is palpably present in the background of *Pericles*, as of many of Shakespeare's comedies. For their early Jacobean audience Shakespeare (and Wilkins) felt no need to apologize for their hero's out of the blue adventures, fascinating coincidences, hypersensitive awareness, or for that matter princely dignity.

Obscenity. If writing a picaresque play, and salting it with a little naughtiness—some incest, some introductions to the life of the whorehouse—it is useful to accept, as your co-author, a seasoned pandar like George Wilkins—and Shakespeare did just that. For the seasoned reader of Shakespeare what the bard shows us, on this occasion, is how little dark sexuality, or for that matter sexuality which is other than word play, Shakespeare employs in the entire body of his own work.

Pathos. The emotional pathos of rediscovery—that most thematic of Shakesperian turns of experience, the heart of the lost identity surprise in the author's comedies—is finely tuned in the mutual rediscovery of Pericles and his daughter Marina, who have been separated from one another by the shipwreck which (seemingly) did away with Marina's mother. The entire play, of course, is tied up with the mutual rediscovery of husband and wife, at the shrine of Diana.

Coincidence The coincidence of mutual rediscovery, between twins separated at birth, or siblings separated along life's way, is common in Elizabethan drama, especially artfully handled in plays like *All's Well that Ends Well*or *The Comedy of Errors*. In *Pericles* the triple rediscovery, of husband and daughter, then of husband and daughter with wife and mother, is surprisingly touching.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

PERICLES

Character The main character, Pericles, is hardly a truly dimensional literary character, of whom you would say that he represents a piece of real life. (For that, in Shakespeare, one might go to Falstaff, King Henry IV, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth). What is he then? He is a picaresque prince, adventurous on the spur of the moment—see how quickly he proposes himself at the court of Antiochus, how rapidly he flees after having grasped the import of the riddle before him—generous and loving when it comes to helping Cleon, whose people are starving, charming and manly when it comes to winning Thaissa's heart, and, of course, a perfect dad when it comes to the rediscovery of Marina again, or of his wife who is now a Diana priestess. In all of these roles, Pericles is an attractive and understandable figure, and yet In the end, when we place him beside the major Shakespearean characters, he is a little pasteboard, so that his final reunion, with the priestess of the goddess sounds like the grand finale of a Broadway musical.

Parallels. Both Odysseus and Don Quixote come to mind, as parallels to Pericles. Odysseus, like Pericles, is hurrying home, though he is exhausted with war, while Pericles is fleeing a curse imposed by Antiochus. Both men head across the seas, survive shipwrecks and evil plotters, and eventually make it home. Don Quixote stands for the dignity of the classical knightly age, travels across the fallen modern world, and comes out of his adventures as a beloved, gutsy and more than a little amusing figure, a good sample of pre modern European characteristics. Pericles is more nearly a figure of fancy than the Don, but as such represents a similar tribute to the passing age of knightly nobility and threatened virtue, as in his daughter's unparalleled ability to reject vice, or his own gift for using coincidence to his ennobling advantage.

Illustrative moments

Blunt. Pericles sharply tells the daughter of Antiochus, that he will have nothing of her, since he is aware of the nasty fate awaiting any suitor who correctly interprets the riddle posed by King Antiochus.

Precipitous. Pericles quickly determines to flee Antioch, after he has realized the fatal conundrum posed by the riddle of King Antiochus. Pericles flees back to his home court of Tyre, from where he will quickly flee again, to Tarsus.

Fugitive. His only motivation, in appearance, the fear of Antiochus' hired assassins, Pericles quickly looks toward Tarsus as his next refuge. He has left Helicanus In charge of the government of Tyre, and is open to new experience. We work to figure out what kind of picaresque figure this Pericles is.

Compassionate. Upon arrival in Tarsus, Pericles finds that the city's governors, Cleon and Dionyza, are in deep trouble, for famine has seized their land. Pericles' instinctive behavior is to share the grain from his ship with the unfortunate Tarsians.

Coincidence. After leaving Tarsus, Pericles and his crew come on fishermen who are drawing in their nets. By coincidence they pull from the sea a rusted but useable piece of armor which Pericles had previously lost at sea. Pericles will use this armor to fight and win a combat for his wife, Thaissa.

Discussion questions

Cymbeline, Pericles, The Tempest: these are all late plays of Shakespeare, written at the end of the first decade of the l7th century. When you think back, from these works, to the nitty gritty world presented by the *Henriad* twenty years earlier, do you feel that Shakespeare's mindset has radically changed? Has he learned the tricks of his trade and figured out how to take more chances with his interpretation of the human condition? Has he let himself go into becoming more frankly 'poetic,' open to the faery consciousness in*The Tempest* (or *A Midsummer Night's Dream,*already in 1596), into the rangy-romantic free plotting of *Cymbeline*, or into the fantasy landscape of princedoms and chivalry, in *Pericles?*

Should we decide to call *Pericles*a romance? Has it a concrete historical setting? Or does it take place in a realm of fancy? Has Shakespeare been drawn to romance, by this time at the end of his playwriting career? Would you call *Romeo and Juliet*a romance? *The Winter's Tale*? As for the quality of romance, in Pericles, we must wonder how it fits with the undertones of incest and prostitution. Do they belong to the mind of a Shakespeare, who though rough and ready in dialogue, always transmutes language through imagination, before leaving it alone on the page?

In 1629 Ben Jonson said, in reference to the Pericles play:

No doubt some mouldy tale,
Like Pericles; and stale
As the Shrieve's crusts, and nasty as his fish—
Scraps out of every dish
Throwne forth, and rak't into the common tub…

T. S. Eliot, three centuries later, heaped praise on Pericles, thinking the recognition scene in Act V, which brings Pericles together with Marina, is one of the jewels of English poetic imagination. How do you explain such discrepancies of critical opinion?