

William Shakespeare's

# PERICLES

CSULB University Players

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## Study Guide

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## Plot Summary

Shakespeare's *Pericles* opens with the resurrection of the poet John Gower, who has come to life to tell the audience an ancient story. Gower serves as the chorus, narrator and commentator of *Pericles*. He appears between various scenes to help the audience remember, and understand, what they have just seen. As well as, helping the audience prepare for what is coming next in the play.

*Pericles*, the prince of Tyre, has arrived in Antioch to court the king's daughter. In order to win her, *Pericles* must solve the king's riddle. If he does not solve the riddle, he will be killed. *Pericles* solves the riddle which reveals that the king, Antiochus, is in an incestuous relationship with his daughter. Antiochus realizes that *Pericles* has found out his secret and vows to kill *Pericles*. *Pericles*, fearing for his own life flees Antioch and travels throughout the Mediterranean to escape the wrath of Antiochus.

Meanwhile, in Tarsus, King Cleon, his wife Dionyza, and their subjects are starving from famine. When Cleon hears of ships arriving, he fears that someone has arrived to take over his country. However, it is *Pericles* arriving with food for the starving kingdom in exchange for shelter for him and his men.

*Pericles* leaves to travel to Pentapolis. On the way, he is shipwrecked and is the sole survivor. Once he is washed up on shore, he learns from the fisherman that King Sinonides rules the land, and he has a beautiful daughter. The following day is her birthday, and suitors will be jousting for her hand in marriage. *Pericles* decides to take place in the jousting. He wins the heart and hand of the princess, Thaisa. *Pericles* and Thaisa then head home for Tyre and on the way, Thaisa gives birth to a daughter, but she dies in labor. *Pericles* names the daughter Marina and throws the body of his wife overboard.

On the coast of Ephesus, Thaisa's coffin is discovered, and inside she is alive. Meanwhile, *Pericles* returns to Tarsus and asks Cleon and Dionyza to look after Marina, as if she was their own daughter, as she grows into a young woman. However, Dionyza becomes jealous of Marina and tries to have her killed. Luckily, she is saved by pirates at the last minute and she is taken to Mytilene to work in a brothel. She escapes life in the brothel, but is still bound by servitude.

*Pericles* returns for his daughter, but is informed that she has died. He then travels to Mytilene, but is still destitute about the death of Marina. The governor brings a young girl to the ship to cheer up *Pericles*. This young woman recounts the story of her life, and soon *Pericles* realizes it is Marina. Then, the goddess Diana appears to *Pericles* and tells him to go to her temple in Ephesus where he and Marina are united with Thaisa.

## **William Shakespeare**

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is among the best known English poets and playwrights ever to live. Throughout his life he wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and several long narrative poems. His plays generally fit into four categories: tragedies, comedies, histories, and romances. Shakespeare's works have been translated into numerous languages, and are still being performed all over the world. In English speaking countries, Shakespeare is so widely read that his works are second in popularity only to the Bible. He is sometimes referred to as the "Bard of Avon" or "The Bard". When William Shakespeare was 18, he married Anne Hathaway with whom he had several children, including twins named Hamnet and Judith. Around 1592, he left his wife and children to pursue his theatrical career in London. Shakespeare was not only a writer; he was also an actor and part-owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, named after their aristocratic sponsor Lord Chamberlain. After the death of Queen Elizabeth I, the company changed their name to the King's Men, after King James I. Shakespeare returned to Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1613, where he died on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52. All of Shakespeare's grandchildren died without having children of their own, so Shakespeare has no direct descendants living today.

## **George Wilkins**

George Wilkins was an English dramatist and pamphleteer. He was a member of the King's Men, and a colleague of William Shakespeare. In 1608, Wilkins published the novel *The Painfull Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre, being the true history of Pericles as it was lately presented by...John Gower*, which follows the Shakespearean play very closely. Many critics believe, for this reason, Wilkins may have co-authored Pericles with Shakespeare.

## **John Gower (1330-1408)**

John Gower was an English poet who was born in Kent. He was trained in law, but appears never to have practiced it. Gower wrote in three languages: French, Latin and English. His most acclaimed work was *Confessio Amantis* (Lover's Confession). When he was seventy years old, Gower married Anne Groundolf, but he continued to live in the priory of St. Mary Overy (now St. Savior), Southwark, to which he was a generous benefactor. Gower died in 1408 and was buried at the chapel of St. John the Baptist in St. Mary Overy.

### ***Shakespeare Fun Fact:***

In Shakespeare's day women were not allowed to act on stage. The women's roles were all played by men or boys, so the original Juliet and her Romeo were actually both male actors. In fact, Shakespeare wrote several comedies where female characters disguise themselves as boys. So in those cases, boys played girls who were pretending to be boys!

## The Globe Theatre

The Globe Theatre is the theatre where the Lord Chamberlain's Men first staged Shakespeare's plays post-1598. The theatre was originally built in 1599 in Southwark where it remained until it burned to the ground in 1613. It is believed to have been either a circle or an octagon. At the base of the stage was the "yard", where the audience stood to watch the performance. Around the yard there were two levels of seating, which were the Twopenny Rooms and the Penny Gallery. The Globe was rebuilt in 1614, closed in 1642, and demolished in 1644. A modern version of the original Globe, called Shakespeare's Globe Theatre", was opened in 1997.

### *Shakespeare Fun Fact:*

In Shakespeare's time, mattresses were secured on bed frames by ropes. When you pulled on the ropes the mattress tightened, making the bed firmer to sleep on. That's where the phrase, "goodnight, sleep tight" comes from.

## *Apollonius of Tyre and Shakespeare's Pericles*

Shakespeare's *Pericles* was an adaptation of a popular Greek romance *Apollonias of Tyre*. The story is very much the same as Shakespeare's *Pericles*. It is a tale of love and adventure, set in the pagan Mediterranean world of classical antiquity, with exciting episodes involving shipwreck, piracy, separation and reunion, and supernatural intervention.

The story of Apollonius has a literary history whose origins date at least to the fifth or sixth century A.D. An adaptation of the story is seen several times before Shakespeare uses it for his *Pericles*. Through its translations and adaptations an ancient Greek romance has been written in prose, verse and as drama. However, no matter how the literature itself has been adapted, each proved the power of restoration in the end. The Greek romance was translated after the fall of the Roman Empire to what is considered the Old English version of Apollonius. The Old English version stays close to its source, yet gives themes new meaning relevant to late Anglo-Saxon society. The adaptation portrays the evils of social injustice and gender discrimination; it prompts recognition for the need of reform. During the late Fourteenth century John Gower adapted the story of *Apollonius* in his *Confession Amans*. Here we see deliberate manipulation to satisfy a certain vision. Gower wanted to see a return to traditional hierarchies versus its sources that sought increased female liberties and rights. So between 1606 and 1608, when Shakespeare was believed to have written *Pericles*, there existed two primary sources of Apollonius with opposing views. Shakespeare was aware of the tale's potential to evoke conflicting responses. He took the story and shifted thematic interests "from the destructive power of evil to the restorative power of good". Thus, we get Shakespeare's version of *Apollonius of Tyre* in his *Pericles*.

### ***Shakespeare Fun Fact:***

The number of different words counted in Shakespeare's works is 17,700. The average person today has a vocabulary of about 2,000 words. Many of the words Shakespeare used had not been written down before, and it is believed he may have made many of them up. Some words attributed to him include: leapfrog, submerged, dwindle, countless, fretful, barefaced, and lonely.

### **Who Wrote Pericles?**

Did you know that Shakespeare may not have written *Pericles*? Other authors may have written all or some of the play, but no one knows for sure. For centuries, scholars have debated the authorship of *Pericles*, arguing whether Shakespeare wrote all, some, or none of the play. The primary argument against full Shakespearean authorship stems from the vast differences between the first two acts of the play and the last three. Many scholars now believe that Shakespeare collaborated with the lesser-known playwright, George Wilkins, with Wilkins writing most of Acts I and II and Shakespeare writing most of Acts III-V.

No matter who wrote *Pericles*, one thing is for sure: we can never be quite sure what he (or they) wrote! As with all other Shakespearean plays, there is no existing original manuscript of *Pericles* written in the author's own hand. What we have instead are the earliest printed editions of Shakespeare's plays, called quartos, which were often made with the help of actors who tried their best to remember their lines. When the first printing of *Pericles* appeared in 1609, the text was latent with apparent errors. Since Shakespeare's own time, readers and editors have struggled to make sense of the damaged text. Even today, different editions of the play contain slightly different texts. Each editor of *Pericles* strives to provide readers with the most accurate version of the play, but editors often have different opinions about the author's original intentions.

### ***Shakespeare Fun Fact:***

There are many things about *Pericles* that make it different from all other Shakespearean plays. *Pericles* is the only one that uses dumb shows as a reoccurring device in the play to help advance the plot. A dumb show is a scene in which the actors perform a story without speaking, much like mimes. In *Pericles*, Gower presents several dumb shows to help him tell his story. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also contains a dumb show, but *Hamlet*'s dumb show is part of the play within the play which *Hamlet* and a troupe of actors put on for the king and his court.

## Shakespeare 101

Shakespeare may seem like a foreign language when you first hear it or read it, but it's just a matter of understanding his writing style to uncover the truth of his words. He was a poet and therefore his writing was heightened from everyday speech. All of his lines were carefully thought out to stay within the structure of the poetry.

Shakespeare uses 2 types of writing:

Prose- Non-structured, paragraph form (i.e. normal text)

Verse- Iambic Pentameter, poetry.

### What is Iambic Pentameter?

It is the spoken rhythm of a verse line of Shakespeare. Every other syllable is "stressed". Lines almost always begin with unstressed syllables. So, it sounds like a heartbeat.

Verse:

"These mouths, who but of late earth, sea and air," -Pericles: Line 34

Prose:

"Nay master, said not I as much when I saw the porpoise, how he bounc'd and tumbled?"

Blank verse is when the lines are in Iambic Pentameter but do not rhyme.

\*Important: The end of a line does not represent the end of a thought. Just as in everyday speech, the thought ends with the final punctuation. Period, question mark, etc.

### Why does Shakespeare use both verse and prose in his plays?

Often Shakespeare will show the status of his characters through the manner of speech they use. His upper-class, more intelligent characters mainly speak in verse, while his lower class, often simple-minded characters will speak in prose.

This is very evident in Pericles. The nobles all speak in verse; the fishermen and the men in the brothel, however, speak in prose. Thus, Shakespeare allows the audience to observe a difference in the status of these men simply through the way in which they speak.

(See Act II, Scene I, and Act IV, Scene II. Note the difference between Pericles' lines and the other characters in these scenes.)

In many cases these characters will adjust their way of speaking to reach characters they are talking to. For example, in Julius Caesar when Brutus talks to the other noble kinsmen he speaks in verse, but when he speaks to the citizens of Rome he "lowers" his speech to prose for them to understand him.

\*Remember, Shakespeare considered each and every line and sound he wrote intentionally. What to our ears seems so foreign was careful consideration.

## **Reference of Characters**

Gower - the chorus  
Pericles - Prince of Tyre  
Diana - a goddess  
Marina - Pericles' Daughter

### IN ANTIOCH

Antiochus - King of Antioch  
Hesperides - daughter to Antiochus  
Thaliard - servant to Antiochus  
Lords, Ladies, Gentlefolk

### IN TYRE

Helicanus - counsellor to Pericles  
Escanes - counsellor  
Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen

### IN TARSUS

Cleon - governor of Tarsus  
Dionyza - wife to Cleon  
Leonine - servant to Dionyza  
Lords, Other Tarsians, Three Pirates

### IN PENTAPOLIS

Simonides - King of Pentapolis  
Thaisa - daughter of Simonides, wife of Pericles  
Lychorida - a nurse to Thaisa  
Three Fishermen, Knights, Lords, Ladies, Sailors

### IN EPHESUS

Cerimon - a holyman  
Philemon - servant to Cerimon  
Gentlefolk, Servants, Maiden Priests

### IN MYTILENE

Lysimachus - governor of Mytilene  
Pander - brothel owner  
Bawd - wife of Pander  
Boult - servant to Pander & Bawd  
Gentlemen, Lords

### **Study Questions**

1. What does the role of Gower accomplish in the play? Does it succeed in helping to tell the story? Is it distracting? Using examples from the play, show how this device either succeeds or fails in your opinion.
2. How does the set affect the play? Does it aid or does it detract from what goes on onstage? Using examples, show what you believe the role of the set in this piece played.
3. How does this play compare with other Shakespeare plays you may have studied in other classes? Cite examples from this production, and other plays you may have studied.
4. How does seeing Shakespeare performed live compare with seeing it in the numerous television and film adaptations? Using examples from *Pericles* and a filmed version of your choice, show the differences and similarities, and what are possibly the strengths and weaknesses of producing Shakespeare in various mediums.
5. Shakespeare is still performed and reinvented 400 years after he died. Why do you think this is? Use examples from *Pericles* to show why Shakespeare's work can still be considered relevant today, or, why you think it might be outdated.

### **Explore these websites to learn more:**

[www.shakespeare.org.uk/homepage](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/homepage)

[www.folger.edu/template/cfm?cid=1245](http://www.folger.edu/template/cfm?cid=1245)

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu>

<http://ise.uvic.ca/Foyer/resources.html>

[www.imdb.com/name/nm0000636](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000636)

[www.missouristate.edu/English/eirc/shpag.html](http://www.missouristate.edu/English/eirc/shpag.html)

<http://wiredforbooks.org/shakespeare/>

[www.talkingto.co.uk/ttws/index.asp](http://www.talkingto.co.uk/ttws/index.asp)

[www.shakespearehigh.com](http://www.shakespearehigh.com)

[www.ipl.org/div/shakespeare/shakespeare.html](http://www.ipl.org/div/shakespeare/shakespeare.html)

[www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444972/](http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444972/)

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shakespeare/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shakespeare/)