Pericles, Prince of Tyre
By William Shakespeare

Study Guide:
More information about our production

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PLAY SYNOPSIS

ACT 1

Seeking to find a wife, Pericles, Prince of Tyre travels to Antioch where he is faced with a riddle to win the hand of Antiochus’ daughter. Upon guessing the riddle, Pericles realizes his life is in danger and decides, in consultation with his confidant Helicanus, that he must flee. The first stop on his flight is Tarsus, where Pericles relieves a widespread famine and receives harborage from King Cleon and Queen Dionyza. However, the fear of pursuit by an assassin from Antioch soon propels Pericles to take his leave.

Pericles is next shipwrecked on the coast of Pentapolis, where he encounters three fishermen. Hearing from one of them of a tournament at court to vie for the love of King Simonides’ daughter, Thaisa, Pericles journeys to the court to participate in the joust. Though he is bedraggled from his shipwreck and his looks invite mockery, Pericles wins the joust and the admiration of both Thaisa and her father. By the end of the banquet thrown in Thaisa’s honor, Simonides commands that Pericles and Thaisa should be married.

Following their marriage, Pericles receives word that he must go home to help subdue the chaos in Tyre. While sailing home, Thaisa dies in childbirth during a violent storm and her body is thrown overboard. Pericles takes the newborn baby, Marina, to Cleon and Dionyza for a safe upbringing in Tarsus. Meanwhile, Thaisa’s coffin washes up on the shores of Ephesus, where Cerimon realizes that Thaisa might be able to be revived.

ACT 2

Fourteen years later, Marina has grown into a beauty, inspiring jealousy in Dionyza (whose own daughter just can’t quite compare). Dionyza hires a murderer to take Marina out of the picture, but before the murderer can complete his task, pirates sweep through and capture Marina. The pirates sell Marina to Bawd and Pandar—the owners of a brothel in Mytilene. But Marina, determined to remain a virgin, will not yield to her customers and instead converts their ways. When Governor Lysimachus comes to the brothel, he too is changed by his encounter with Marina. Embarrassed and ashamed at his behavior, he gives her gold and says he will help her if he can. Marina then convinces a disgruntled Boult (the servant at the brothel) that she could better make money for them by teaching sewing, dancing, singing, and other noble skills in the houses of reputable women.

Meanwhile Pericles, having quelled the uprisings at home, returns to Tarsus for Marina, only to be informed that she is dead. He goes into mourning and returns to sea, eventually landing in the harbor at Mytilene. Learning of King Pericles’ melancholy, Lysimachus calls for Marina to come try to cheer him up. She does so, and Pericles discovers that she is his daughter. In thankful prayer following this reunion, Pericles is visited by the goddess Diana, who tells him to go to Ephesus. There he finds Thaisa, and the family reunion is complete.

“Whereby I see that time’s the king of men:
He’s both their parent, and he is their grave,
And gives them what he will, not what they crave.”
-Pericles, Pericles, Prince of Tyre
From Concept to Creation: A Conversation with Designers

Pericles takes us on a grand journey that travels through several kingdoms (some good, some bad), weathers perilous storms at sea, and ultimately offers us hope as Pericles endures the hardships that befall him. Long before the actors started to rehearse, our designers and director were meeting regularly to discuss the play and how best to tell this unique story. To get the scoop on how the designs were developed, assistant dramaturg Jack O’Brien sat down with scenic designer Sean A. Coté and costume designer Heather Crocker Aulenback to discuss their creative processes for developing the world of Pericles.

Jack O’Brien: After initially reading Pericles, what were your thoughts on this little-known Shakespeare play?

Sean A. Coté: It felt familiar—the worlds within it are places where we might live but are still outside of our experience as a contemporary audience member. Pericles has multiple loca-
tions: temples, palaces—it is like an adult fairy tale—but I knew that this design had to be both grounded and accessible to keep focus on the story and not lavish scene changes.

JOB: What was your experience of the collaborative process—both with director Shawn Lacount and with the rest of the design team?

Heather Crocker Aulenback: I felt that I had a real sense of collaborative freedom, meaning that I had a great sense of creative freedom. Everyone had equal footing in this design process which really created a stronger energy allowing people to bring their own perspective to the table which made for some really great conversations about this play.

SAC: This production of Pericles is a great example of avid collaboration; Shawn always wanted to see the constant evolution of images that I was finding as I was developing my ideas. One universal convention that was agreed on was that we were more interested in the story telling aspect of this play than commenting on it.

JOB: So with all of this great collaboration, what did it really come down to, what ultimately shaped your designs for this production?

SAC: I researched Greek architecture looking for an evocative image that could help to place the play’s many locations as indoors, outdoors, a pier, a seashore, etc. as needed. The color of the set is a neutral tone so that the characters in costume can really stand out on stage. One of the many reoccurring themes in this play is spirituality and in order to help open up the stage I created the wire sculpture which keeps moving up to the sky to give the feeling that these characters on stage can reach up and communicate with the Gods.

HCA: I took the world of the play and expanded it by creating a cultural diversity of costumes for every different place that Pericles travels to. Antioch was influenced by the Persian Empire while Tarsus was influenced by the Egyptians and the Pirates were influenced by Spanish culture. This helped to create a greater sense of travel throughout the play. When analyzing the script I looked for key words and descriptions to help describe these various locations.
Speaking Shakespeare

Four hundred years after the Bard penned his last play, we still feel his influence daily. Literally. Shakespeare’s writing yielded significant contributions to common English words and phrases. In writing his nearly forty plays, Shakespeare used 29,066 different words—a tremendous number when you consider that the King James Bible, first published in 1611, used around 12,143 distinct English words and that in everyday speech people use around 2,000 different words. Shakespeare also coined a number of phrases, and created over 1,700 words as he wrote.

Shakespeare also invented many of the most-used expressions in our language, as the following excerpt from Bernard Levin’s The Story of English demonstrates:

“If you cannot understand my argument, and declare “It’s Greek to me”, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare;

“If you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, laughed yourself into stitches, had short shift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool’s paradise—why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare;

“if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then—to give the devil his due—if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare;

“even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I were dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then— by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness’ sake! what the dickens! but me no buts - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.”
William Shakespeare was a consummate man of the theater. Both an actor and a playwright, he wrote 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and numerous other poems over the course of his life. It helped, of course, that during Shakespeare’s life the theater was a popular form of entertainment. Given its popularity, Shakespeare was able to profit quite well from being in the theater business.

Despite the popularity of the theater, plays were highly regulated in the England of Shakespeare’s day. Theater troupes had to be granted licenses in order to perform, and individual plays had to pass the Lord Chamberlain’s approval (a form of censorship). Shakespeare spent most of his life working with the troupe the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (renamed The King’s Men in 1603). In 1599 their company took up residence at the newly constructed Globe Theater in London—the theater that came to be linked to Shakespeare’s fame.

Shakespeare’s plays are typically classified into four categories: comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances. *Pericles* falls into the romance category, as do the other plays that Shakespeare wrote at the end of his career (*The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale*). These late plays are unique for the extraordinary events that take place in their plots, for the presence of gods or goddesses on stage, and for having redemption as a major theme.
Sources of Inspiration

Many of Shakespeare’s plays draw on older stories, and so is the case with *Pericles*. In fact, *Pericles* is Shakespeare’s most direct adaptation of other stories. *Pericles* has its deepest roots in the ancient Greek story of *Apollonius of Tyre*. This romantic tale follows the fate of Apollonius and contains storms at sea, pirates, apparent death, reunited lovers and dreams.

The ‘original’ *Apollonius of Tyre* story survives to the present day in several Greek and Latin manuscripts dating to the Middle Ages, and the story has been included in sweeping works such as the 14th-century *Gesta Romanorum*. In the 1390s, John Gower retold the story of Apollonius of Tyre in his *Confessio Amantis*.

The tale became very popular during the Renaissance. The first printed English version of the story appeared in 1502. The story appeared in England in novel form at the end of the 1500s when Laurence Twine published *The Patterne of Painefull Adventures*. Though the overall tale is much older than either Gower or Twine, the *Confessio Amantis* and *The Patterne of Painefull Adventures* are generally recognized as Shakespeare’s direct sources.

**John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis***

Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* is widely regarded as Shakespeare’s primary source. *The Confessio Amantis* is the confession of a lover, Amans, to Genius, a priest of Venus, and the poem contains 141 stories written as octosyllabic couplets. Genius’ telling of the story of Apollonius of Tyre takes up much of Book VIII of the *Confessio Amantis*; Genius uses this story to warn Amans against ‘unlawful love’ such as that exhibited by Antiochus and his daughter.

From Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Shakespeare has drawn his Chorus, called Gower in his original script (and played by Cerimon in our production). Like Genius in the *Confessio Amantis*, the Gower character in Shakespeare acts as a storyteller. Shakespeare’s Gower also speaks in the rhyming couplets characteristic of John Gower (the poet) throughout most of the play. In addition to drawing the idea of the storyteller from the *Confessio Amantis* and the storyteller’s identity from its author, Shakespeare also takes the basic outline of his plot, most of his character’s names, and the names of places from this work.

**Laurence Twine’s *The Patterne of Painefull Adventures***

*The Patterne of Painefull Adventures* is largely seen as a secondary source of influence on Shakespeare. Twine’s influence is particularly evident in the portion of *Pericles* dealing with Marina. It is Twine’s *Patterne of Painefull Adventures* that introduces Marina’s abduction by pirates, that gives Lysimachus a more prominent role in the script, and that creates a vivid and colorful world surrounding the brothel and its inhabitants.

While drawing heavily on these sources, Shakespeare, of course, also makes the story his own: he introduces the jousting tournament at Simonides’ court, he extends the recognition scene between Pericles and Marina, and he cuts out a marriage ceremony between Marina and Lysimachus that would extend the play long beyond where we leave it. To some extent, what Shakespeare does is to make his sources dramatic and stage-worthy. But Shakespeare also alters the story in ways that alter the meaning of our story, such that instead of a strictly moral tale such as the *Confessio Amantis*, we have in *Pericles* the journey of a hero through the archetypal rhythms of birth, life, death, and rebirth. In many ways, therefore, Shakespeare turns *Pericles* into an adult fairy tale.
Adapting Pericles for Production

Throughout history, Shakespeare’s plays have been cut and modified heading into production. At various times in history, cuts and modifications have achieved different purposes. Sometimes a cut will help a director to emphasize a particular take on her production; at other times a cut will even change the outcome of a play to fit the conventions of the day in which the play is being performed. These days, most cuts seek to tell an abbreviated version of the story penned by Shakespeare, as our modern-day audiences are not usually keen to spend four hours sitting in the theater.

Director Shawn LaCount and I crafted this version of Pericles for UMass Theater’s production of the Bard’s play. In working on this cut, we were driven by a few key ideas. First, we wanted to tell a story that was compelling. Whether or not Shakespeare wrote the entirety of Pericles (which is questioned by many scholars), there are parts that are more compelling and parts that are less compelling. One of our main goals was to find the parts that were most compelling and to let these sing, while paring down or eliminating bits of the story that we found less compelling—either because they were largely expository or because they seemed to slow down the unfolding action of the play.

Another major goal was to have a script that continually pushed the story forward. The play moves from place to place very rapidly most of the time, and we wanted to make sure that our script supported that movement. If we have done our job well, we should feel as though the story almost flashes before our eyes, with barely enough time to get adjusted to any given location or event before the story sweeps onward.

For those who know the original story, you will notice a few particular changes:

Gower—Shakespeare’s play is narrated by Gower, a reference to the 14th-century poet John Gower, whose Confessio Amantis was one of the main sources for Shakespeare’s play. Our version retains a narrator, but has shifted the identity of this narrator such that our narrator is one of the other characters from our play.

Tyre—Pericles is, of course, the Prince of Tyre. Even in its original form, the play spends very little time in Tyre, and we decided to omit Tyre entirely from the list of places we travel. In order to do this, we have moved a portion of the first scene that takes place in Tyre to Antioch.

Diana—At the end of Pericles, the Goddess Diana appears and tells Pericles what to do next. Early on in the process, we determined that we would not actually see Diana on stage. After much deliberation we have also decided that hearing Diana’s voice is not supported in our production. Our moment of having a character spoken to by a god is therefore much less direct than in the original script.

—Liana Thompson

Sources and Further Reading

