

Pericles, Prince of Tyre

Pericles – Synopsis

The Original Play :

Act I

A poet named Gower introduces the story, a tale that begins with King Antiochus. The King is protecting an incestuous relationship with his daughter by promising marriage to her for anyone who can solve a (seemingly) impossible riddle. If the riddle is guessed incorrectly, the suitor will die. After many men fail, the young Prince Pericles of Tyre guesses the truth. He reveals the inappropriate relationship, and he flees for his life. King Antiochus instructs his servant Thaliart to murder Pericles. Thaliart follows him back to Tyre.

Pericles returns home and confides his revelations in his friend Lord Helicanus. His friend advises the Prince to travel abroad to escape before anyone comes to kill him. Meanwhile, the governor of Tarsus, Cleon, and his wife, Dionyza, bewail the state of famine. After fleeing Tyre, Pericles hears of their troubles and arrives with food to relieve them.

Act II

Helicanus sends news to Pericles, warning him of Thaliart, so the Prince sets sail again. However, his ship is wrecked during storms at sea. Pericles is cast ashore, recovering to find a group of fishermen. From them, he learns of a forthcoming festival to celebrate the birthday of Thaisa, daughter of King Simonides. During this conversation, they also tell him of a jousting contest. The champion will win the hand of Thaisa (giving away one's daughter during a contest must have been very fashionable back then). The fishermen bring up their fishing nets to find a rusty suit of armour, which Pericles takes to contend for the princess.

During the contest, Pericles defeats five knights, becoming the champion. He is given a feast by Simonides and wins the love of Thaisa. Pericles remains at court for several months after his marriage. Then he hears news from his friend Helicanus that Antiochus and his daughter are dead, so he may safely return home. In Tyre, the lords have waited in the hope of their Prince's return. Pericles sets sail with Thaisa, now pregnant with his child, to reclaim his throne at Tyre.

Act III

During storms at sea, Thaisa seemingly dies giving birth to a daughter. Pressured by the crew, Pericles allows Thaisa's sealed coffin to be cast overboard. Pericles changes course to land at Tarsus. He leaves the newborn baby, named Marina, along with her nurse Lichorida, in the care of his friends, Cleon and Dionyza, before returning to Tyre.

Early the next morning, people discover a sealed box near the seashore of Ephesus. They call a doctor, who finds Thaisa's sleeping body inside, along with jewels and a letter from Pericles. After some work, the princess is revived. She becomes certain that her husband and baby have drowned at sea. Without hope of finding them, Thaisa goes to live in the nearby temple of the goddess Diana.

Act IV

The poet Gower explains how fifteen years pass as Marina grows up with Cleon's daughter Philoten. Soon, however, Dionyza becomes jealous on behalf of Philoten of Marina's beauty and plans her murder. Just as Marina is about to be killed, pirates capture the girl and carry her off to Mytilene to be sold as a prostitute. Marina's reported beauty attracts many men. But she persuades everyone not to violate her virginity. In fact, many men leave resolved to better their lives. Eventually, the owner of the brothel lets her leave to become a waiting maid, developing and using skills in singing, sewing, and dance.

Meanwhile, Pericles and Helicanus return to Tarsus to see Marina. Instead they are shown Marina's (false) tomb. Distraught by his daughter's supposed loss, Pericles resolves never to enjoy life again and takes to sailing the seas at random. When his ship arrives finally at Mytilene, the governor Lysimachus welcomes him. Lysimachus hears of the Prince's withdrawn depression and sends for Marina. He has heard of her virtuous and inspirational reputation.

Act V

Pericles initially rejects Marina, but when she tells him her name and the story of her birth at sea, Pericles realises she is his lost daughter. He is overcome with happiness. That night, while he sleeps, he dreams of Diana's temple at Ephesus. He resolves to give thanks at the temple and sails with Marina. She, meanwhile, has become betrothed to Lysimachus. In Ephesus, Pericles tells his story to the priestess, only to discover that she is his wife, Thaisa. Everyone is joyously reunited, and they return to Tyre. Gower ends the

tale with news that Cleon and Dionyza have been killed by an uprising, owing to their treatment of Marina.

The Opera : Opening Section :

Antiochus (bass)

Timandra (soprano)

Pericles (tenor)

Anthrax (Bass)

Messengers (Aamon and Castor) : Tenor and Baritone

Minstrels sing of the conflict between higher heavenly aspiration and the need for involvement in the human condition and the world (*Music No.1*). The scene moves to Antioch. The King is protecting an incestuous relationship with his daughter by promising marriage to her for anyone who can solve a (seemingly) impossible riddle. If the riddle is guessed incorrectly, the suitor will die. After many men fail, the young Prince Pericles of Tyre guesses the truth. Timandra, the daughter, begs Pericles to take her with him as he prepares to flee. Her father stabs her. She dies and Pericles escapes. (*Music No.2.*)

Pericles

A Romantic Drama for Music

Part the First

A minstrel seen on one side of the stage in a dim light. On the other side a small group of others (who will later form the chorus). They will be faintly illuminated when they start to sing.

Minstrel :

Upon a pillar lived a saint
Above a sea of silent sands.
A well there was of outline faint –
Below – unreached by any hands.
A well of souls – and at the base
The key to life – to all we be.
No hand can reach its hiding place
Nor turn the lock that fits the key.

The saint ascetic looks aloft -
Does faith his lonely lot decree
Or pride, by which he's tainted oft?
Who knows? How good or bad is he?

ii.

Other Minstrels :

And we as well may set our sight
 On higher things above the sands.
A heaven world forever bright.
 Away from life's far lower strands.
Away from greed and passions hot,
 From lusts that foam like burning sea
But ah, our needs we cannot blot.
 They live – more woe for you and me.

Oh let us – how the hope expands! -
Live well – not dry as desert sands.
Oh let us in the world still be
But calm – find peace in apogee.

Yes. let us, as our breath commands
Live well – not dry as desert sands.
Oh let us find the hidden key
To life where peace we guarantee.

(They fade. Gower discovered in mediaeval dress on a bare stage, with a book. There may be a pool beside him which he may stir with a stick.)

Gower (spoken) : A bare stage. A drop of ink. A pool from which to stir a world. And what a world. There was a court, you see. The court of Antiochus. Who was a king who had lost his wife. But had a daughter. Heavenly. She was heavenly. Her beauty was called so. And so it was that many questers came in search of her. Seeking love, seeking marriage. Who would not wish for it? Only there was a blight. A flaw in the gem. A snake in the lilies. It was a snake in the form of a riddle. Answer the riddle and the girl is yours. You are enthroned in her heaven. Fail and you die. And are impaled. There are many so impaled as you will see. And so there comes a prince called Pericles. And tries the test – seeks now the hidden key. (He stirs the pool and fades. Curtain opens on the following tableau)

(Curtains part. A scene of lavish, barbaric splendour is revealed. Antiochus and Timandra, his daughter, discovered on golden thrones, with courtiers around them in extravagant poses. His chief guards, Anthrax, Aamon and Castor also present. An atmosphere of sex and death pervades, the latter augmented by the dead heads of failed suitors on spikes, lighted by braziers and torches, scattered around)

Music No.2.

Scena - Antiochus, Timandra, Pericles and Chorus of Courtiers and Attendants

Where decadence on coloured wings

Bedazzles by its doing

And sweet seductive music sings,

Though pestilence is brewing

And father to his daughter brings

A deed she's ill-pursuing

We laugh. We praise these clever things :

They're billing – they are cooing.

We praise the burnished body heat,

That virtue can't and won't defeat.

The passion taken nice and neat

With slaughter then accruing.

Antiochus, Timandra and Chorus :

Oh love and live in body heat

With fruits forbidden well replete.

In dung they're ripened at (my/our) feet.

(I'm/He's) loving what (I'm/he's) doing.

Chorus :

Yes, love and live in body heat.

Strew roses at the nipple (sweet).

Ensemble :

Antiochus & Timandra :

Let heart not miss
a heady beat.
Keep headily
renewing.

The Rest :

Plug innocence.
Though so petite,
It's welcoming
the wooing.

(Enter two Messengers)

1st Messenger :

Now hail my lord with drumming
Comes one – the latest bait.
A Prince - he's hither coming.
And not inclined wait.

2nd Messenger :

Her charms (the heavens summing)
Attract him to his fate.

Both Messengers :

The riddle he would fain attempt
That leaves no suitor safe exempt.
He's ready - clean and not unkempt.
He's standing at the gate.

Ensemble :

Chorus :

Antiochus :

The riddle he would now
attempt.

Which cannot be from pain
exempt.

He's ready – has of pleasure
dreamt.

It's such a heady fête.

(punning with 'fate')

The riddle he would now
attempt

Which I from pain will not
exempt.

Of others' death I've daily
dreamt.

I'm checking what I'll mate.

All :

The asp may here on lilies feed
Which fester and a poison breed.
A double-dose he'll get indeed.
We well anticipate.

(Antiochus indicates the skulls and death's heads)

Antiochus :

Bring him. Pollute the vista.

Timandra (realising anew her entrapment, even though she has been seduced by its luxuries and now scenting a possible freedom) :

Ah, had I now a sister!

Then free I'd be and *she* could stay.

Antiochus :

I'll make him rue this bitter day.

Timandra :

So fair he looks – I'm yet entrapped.

Antiochus :

He'll die. My sins are never capped.

(Two courtiers bring forward a great scroll in a semi-book-like form, which they can hold outstretched between them. The riddle is inscribed on this and should ideally also be made visible to the audience)

Chorus of Girls

(preceding Pericles, scattering petals)

From land where roses grace each tree

And lambs bleat soft on every hill

And gardens where he'd take and see

The maid he thinks a maiden still

Comes one whose every hope would be

To win as by a consent and will

This girl. A shock it seems to me

He'll get - who can their dreams fulfil?

Where shepherd's flute blows fair and free
And blossoms grace the lovely lea,
He lives – by meadow, field and rill,
No more! His dreams we'll coldly kill.

Where shepherds live with nature twinned
And linnets sing when drops the wind,
He lives – in scenes serene and still.
Deplore! To that we'll never thrill.

Lute Song – Pericles and Timandra

From distant land where echoes sound
And hunters' horns may bray,
Yet curtained in
From wider sin,
Bring I my roundelay.

Timandra :

To echoes' sound I make reply,
Though wide the echoes stray.
What's here? A lady's tunings? - aye -
No Siren Song are they.

Ensemble :

Pericles :

Timandra :

Is danger here in heady
glut?

Is danger here? It threatens,
but

No. Sure in peace I'm safely
shut.

Let sin at last be
undercut

Is danger here? Not so,
I say.

Is danger here? Oh never
say.

What cheer. Pure passion's roundelay.

He's here. I'll love him anyway.

Pericles :

Oh magic maid, how sweet the place,
Where I behold her fairy face

Ensemble :

Pericles :

Chorus :

What price if false the echoes
play?

What price if false the echoes
play?

So what? - I'll love her anyway.

Why not? He'll love her anyway.

Antiochus (recit.) :

Show him the riddle – do it.

Pericles :

Ah, now I'll tackle to it.
Guide me, ye gods, on stormy course.
And wit enhance my proper force.
Give here – proceed – make no delay.

(seeking to take the scroll)

Antiochus :

No, wait.

Anthrax :

No, hear – let *others* say.

(He indicates that Aamon and Castor should pronounce the riddle)

Aamon and Castor (alternating as seems appropriate to the music) :

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh, which did me breed.
I sought a husband - in that aim
A father found of noble name.
He's father, son and husband styled.
I mother, wife and yet his child.
How *that* may chance – one-two-in-three -
To live, resolve the matter, ye.

Pericles (singing to agitated music) :

Alas, what this? I cannot think
That sin could lurk on beauty's brink -
Provide such strings for him to ply,
With fingers where they shouldn't pry.
Alas, that songs from higher climes,
To Hell should sink with evil rhymes.

(To the King)

I'll end the play, no more apply.

Timandra :

No wait! I'll else in ashes die.

Trio - Antiochus, Pericles & Timandra :

Timandra :

Oh what a life devoid of good
But now a hope ahead I see.
No other could I love who could
Redeem and so transfigure me.

Anthrax and Aamon :

Oh what a blow she cannot hood
A wish from bonds to travel free.

Timandra :

I'd quick-adjust - both will and should
It's love – the very heart of me.

(to Pericles)

Oh take me off. As breezes blow,
I'll follow - cannot let you go.
In foreign land, by foreign sea,
I'll live – be passion's apogee.

Ensemble :

Timandra :

The plant transferred
at first may shrink
But lives – grows stronger,
then, I think.
Oh take me off o'er
rock and scree
I'll live – be passion's
apogee.

Pericles :

The taken plant
must fade and shrink
And cannot last for long,
I think.
To take you off - how
can it be?
I live – you'd be the
death of me.

Antiochus (in towering fury) :

Fear and fury! How it's growing,
Kills the bloom I loved to see.
Poisoned love is strongly showing
Much in her but more in me.

Anthrax, Castor and Aamon :

Mother's milk he's ill-bestowing
Sticky from a father-tree.

Antiochus :

Am I crossed? I'm overflowing
Still with hate in third degree.

Antiochus, Anthrax, Aamon and Castor :

Fathers won't be superseded.
Jealous love is better heeded.

Antiochus :

(Am I/Is he) crossed with not a plea?
Kill. Consume the heart of thee.

Antiochus, Anthrax, Aamon, Castor :

Silver-shell (though cracked, impeded)
Lily-bell too fondly needed -

Timandra :

Off. O'er rock and sandy scree.

Antiochus :

Off. I'll strike and finish thee.

(Antionchus stabs Timandra)

Chorus (torn between horror and a kind of semi-sexual bloodlust) :

Rage and wrath and perturbation.

Grief and pain (in bitter glee).

Yet another skull-sensation,

Broken in the vertebrae.

Rage and wrath and salivation.

Rage and fear – a bitter spree.

Here is passion's culmination.

Off. It's death in apogee.

Pericles and Castor (Pericles so psychically disturbed as half to share in the savagery) :

Rage and grief and fear and wonder.

Body pulled at once asunder.

Bones to throw on stormy sea.

Off! It's death in apogee.

Antiochus, Anthrax and Aamon :

Grief and pain all sin infested

Passion so is easy-tested.

Pericles :

Bitter bloom on blighted tree.

Timandra (crawling perhaps, bidding Pericles escape) :

Off! (*Antiochus stabs her again*)

Antiochus (sending guards after Pericles) :

It's death in apogee.

Pericles :

Bitter bloom on blighted tree.

Off! (*Antiochus stabs her again*)

Antiochus (sending guards after Pericles) :

It's death in apogee

(Pericles knocks over a candle-stand, causing the tapers to go out. He departs hastily in the confusion, guards pursuing him, led by the three principals. Timandra falls lifeless. Picture. Black out. Then segue Scene Two.)

The well reflects in lower strands.

A cure we seek for passions hot.

A purge to burn with bitter brands.

One coal is left. Destroy it not

But nurse – more work for heavy hands.

The saint ascetic looks aloft

As self-abasement so