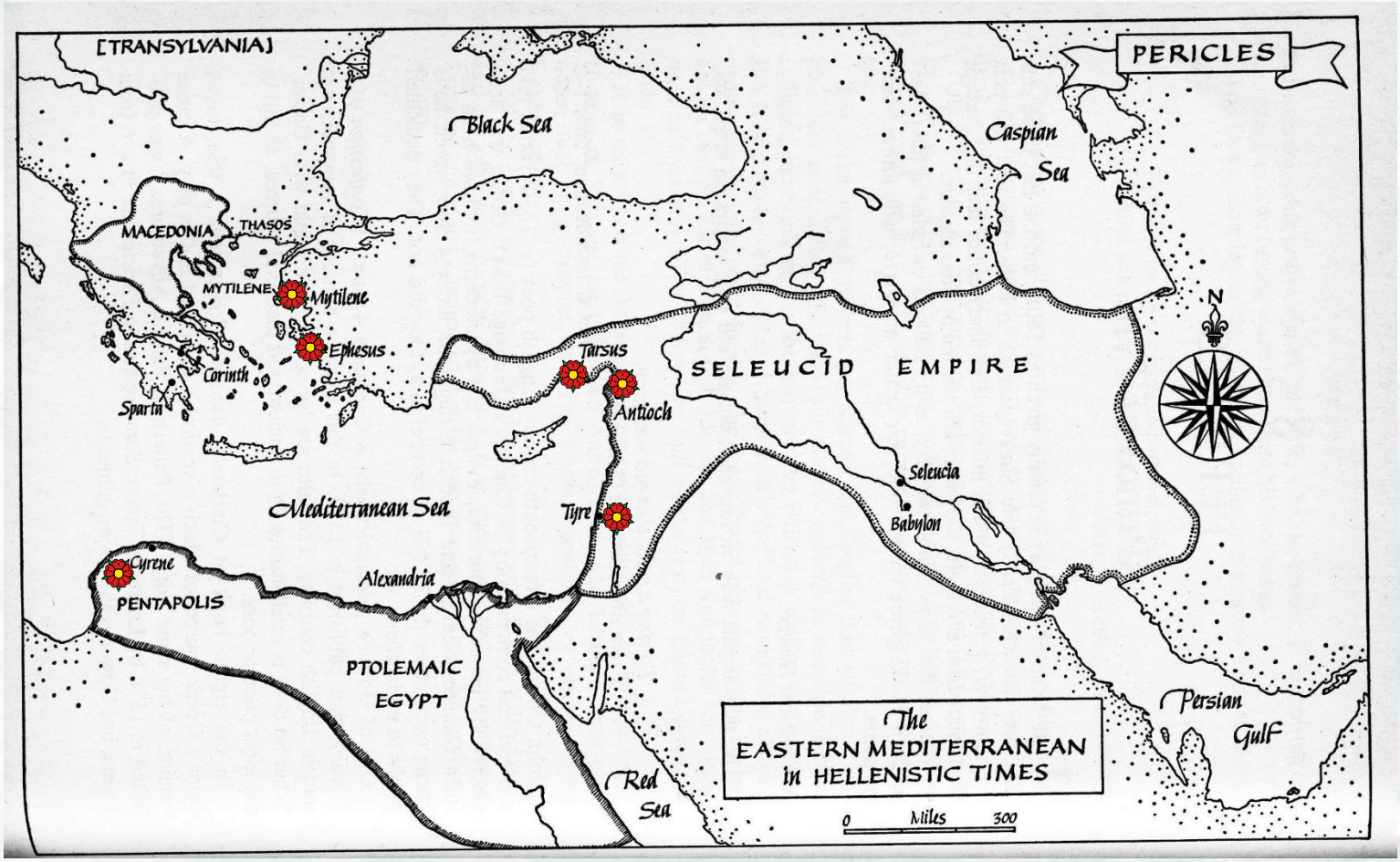
Pericles

A Traveler's Guide

Contents



Tyre

Pericles (*Per-ih-cleez*) – The Prince of Tyre, an adventurous young knight sha ped into a humble King by a decades-long journey

Helicanus (*Hel-ih-CAYN-us*) – A lord and faithful advisor to Pericles who maintains Tyre in his absence

Antioch

(An-tee-ock)

Antiochus (*An-TIE-uh-kuhs*) – The King of Antioch, whose incestuous relationship with his daughter is uncovered by Pericles

Thaliard (*Thay-lee-urd)* – A lower-ranking lord enlisted by Antiochus to kill Pericles

Tarsus

Cleon (*Klee-on*) – Governor of Tarsus

Dionyza (*Die-uh-NYE-zuh*) – Wife to the governor of Tarsus

Leonine (*Lee-oh-nine*) – A murderer sent by Dionyza to kill Marina

Pentapolis

(Pen-TAP-uh-liss)

Thaisa (*Thay-iss-uh*) – The daughter of the King of Pentapolis, and later Pericles' wife

Simonides (*SIGH-mon-ee-dees)* – The King of Pentapolis, Thaisa's father

Lychorida (*Ly-KOR-ih-duh*)– Nurse to Thaisa, and later Marina

Mytilene

(Mih-tuhl-ee-nee)

Marina – Pericles and Thaisa's daughter

Lysimachus (*Ly-SIM-uh-kus*) – The Governor of Mytilene, and later Marina's betrothed

Pander – A brothel owner

Bawd – Oversees the women of the brothel

Boult – Servant to Pander and Bawd

Ephesus

(EH-feh-sus)

Cerimon (*SEAR-uh-mon)* – A physician who nurses Thaisa back to life

Philemon (*Fill-uh-mon)* – A servant to Cerimon

Beyond

Ensemble – The role of John Gower – our play's narrator, the author of *Pericles'* primary source material *Confessio Amantis,* and a father of English literature – is divided among the ensemble in our production

Diana – Roman goddess of childbirth, chastity, the countryside, and the hunt

Plot Synopsis

Pericles, prince of Tyre, arrives in Antioch seeking to solve King Antiochus' riddle; the reward is his daughter's hand in marriage, and the punishment for an incorrect answer is death. To Pericles' horror, the riddle alludes to an incestuous relationship between Antiochus and his daughter. Antiochus offers Pericles a thirty day grace period before he is executed for his answer, but the prince escapes; Antiochus pays one of his lords, Thaliard, to pursue and kill him.

Pericles returns home to Tyre, but suspects he might still be in danger. He expresses his fears to Helicanus, who suggests that the prince travel for a while until it is safe for him to return. Helicanus promises to rule faithfully on Pericles' behalf, and Pericles agrees to leave for Tarsus.

Thaliard arrives in Tyre just as Helicanus explains Pericles' departure to the other lords. Assuming his job is done, as Pericles will either be heard from no longer or die at sea, Thaliard reveals himself as a messenger from Antioch to Pericles and is received warmly.

Pericles approaches Tarsus, a once-prosperous land wrecked by famine. His ship is well-stocked, and he is able to offer much-needed food and aid to the governor of Tarsus, Cleon, his wife Dionyza, and their people before he is called back to Tyre.

On the journey home, Pericles' ship is wrecked and his crew killed in a terrible storm, but he is rescued and embraced by a group of fishermen near Pentapolis. The fishermen tell him that their King, Simonides, will host a tournament the next day to select a husband for his daughter, Thaisa. Despite being a bit worse for wear, Pericles decides to enter.

The next day, Thaisa's suitors are introduced, including an unassuming Pericles. He wins the tournament, and a celebratory banquet is held. Thaisa is so immediately and intensely taken with Pericles that later that night, she writes to her father that she refuses to marry any man but him. Simonides agrees, and the two are married.

Narration covers the passage of time, revealing that Pericles and Thaisa have conceived a child. Still loyally reigning in Pericles's absence, Helicanus writes that Antiochus has died, meaning that Pericles can return safely to Tyre; the people want to crown Helicanus king, but he has insisted that they wait for Pericles' return. Pericles and a pregnant Thaisa leave Pentapolis, bringing along Thaisa's nurse Lychorida.

The action resumes as a terrible storm rages on. Lychorida enters with Pericles' newborn daughter Marina, revealing that Thaisa has died in childbirth. The ship's sailors insist that Thaisa's body must be thrown overboard in order to appease the storm, and Pericles concedes. The ship nears Tarsus, and Pericles demands they stop there rather than pressing on to Tyre that same night, fearing his child will not survive a longer journey.

In Ephesus, Cerimon has offered his home as a place of refuge for a group of shipwrecked sailors. The men come across Thaisa's casket, which includes a letter asking its finder to give her a proper burial. Cerimon suspects Thaisa might not actually be dead and successfully nurses her back to life.

Conscious that he may lose the crown if he does not return to Tyre soon, and fearful that his newborn daughter will not survive the long journey back, Pericles decides to leave Marina in the care of Cleon and Dionyza, with Lychorida remaining there as the child's nurse. Grateful for Pericles' charity toward Tarsus, Cleon and Dionyza promise to raise and teach her as befits a princess.

In Ephesus, Thaisa has fully awoken. As she does not think she will ever see her husband again, she wishes to enter a convent, and Cerimon offers to lead her to a nearby temple of Diana.

Narrators cover a fourteen-year jump in time. Cleon and Dionyza have had a daughter of their own, Philoten, who is overshadowed in every way by Marina's beauty, talent, and grace. After Marina loses her only tie to home with Lychorida's death, a jealous Dionyza enlists a murderer, Leonine, to kill her.

The dialogue resumes as Marina mourns the death of her nurse. Dionyza pressures her to walk home with Leonine, and once they are left alone, Marina quickly realizes she will be killed. As she begs for her life, the two are suddenly ambushed by pirates; Leonine flees, and Marina is taken away to a brothel in Mytilene, where Bawd orders that her virginity be auctioned off.

In Tarsus, Cleon is horrified to learn of Marina's murder, which to his and Dionyza's knowledge was carried through. When Pericles arrives in Tarsus to collect Marina, Cleon and Dionyza show him a fake tomb, and Pericles leaves heartbroken for Tyre.

Meanwhile, Marina has managed to keep her virginity intact by converting each one of her would-be customers to her virtuous ways. She is even able to reform Lysimachus, Mytilene's governor, who is shocked by how beautifully she speaks and transformed by her words. Boult and Bawd are enraged by the loss of business, and Boult threatens to take her by force. She stops him by proposing a deal: the brothel can instead profit from her services as a tutor, teaching her skills and talents to dignified young ladies of Mytilene.

Lost en route to Tyre, Pericles's ship nears the coast of Mytilene, whose people are celebrating the Feast of Neptune. Lysimachus comes onboard and tries in vain to greet the unknown visitor Pericles, who Helicanus warns has not spoken or eaten in three months out of grief for his wife and daughter. One lord suggests that Marina be brought onboard to soothe Pericles' soul with her talents; Lysimachus fervently agrees, extols her virtues, and says he wishes he could marry her himself. Marina boards, and when her singing fails to stir Pericles, she attempts to connect with him by telling her story. Pericles is enraptured and recognizes many of his deceased wife's traits in Marina. As Pericles asks her about her birth and parentage, they gradually uncover that they are

father and daughter. Overcome with emotion, Pericles faints, and while unconscious he is visited by a vision of the goddess Diana. She urges him to travel with Marina to her temple in Ephesus. Before they depart, Pericles gives Lysimachus his blessing to marry Marina.

Pericles, Helicanus, Marina, and Lysimachus arrive at the temple of Diana in Ephesus, where Pericles reveals his identity and past, as instructed by Diana in his vision. Thaisa cries out to him from among the nuns, and the family is reunited. Pericles and Thaisa will live out the rest of their days in Thaisa's homeland Pentapolis, while Lysimachus and Marina will reign as King and Queen in Tyre.

A medieval narrator, a decades-long timeline, an often-confusing series of journeys between forgotten countries – both in the grand scheme of Shakespeare's works and on its own, *Pericles* is a bit of an oddity. If you weren't very familiar with the play before Braving the Bard, you're not alone: compared to most other works by Shakespeare, *Pericles* is very rarely performed, stuck in a level of relative unpopularity that some critics attribute to the play's structural messiness and stylistic quirkiness. Of the play's quirks, then, the most surprising might be that in Shakespeare's day, *Pericles* was one of his most popular works. In this trip through our play's history, context, and creation, we might discover why.

Mapping *Pericles*

Our play's journey through history

When thinking about the structure and style of Shakespeare's plays, particularly one as unique as *Pericles,* it's helpful to keep one eye on the theatrical "trends" and conventions of his time. Shakespeare's professional playwriting career began in the Elizabethan era, widely considered a golden age in English theatre. Before Queen Elizabeth I took the throne in 1558, there was no real popular professional theatre as we – or even as Shakespeare – knew it: plays were almost always performed by amateur touring troupes for religious purposes, and were either retellings of Biblical stories or stiff lessons in morality delivered by characters with names like "Good Deeds" or "Sin." Then, as England eased into a time of relative political peace, Renaissance ideas promoting humanism, innovation, and developments in the arts took root across Europe. After an age in which theatre was stifled and actors were seen as degenerate, Queen Elizabeth rose to the throne as an enthusiastic supporter and generous patron of the arts. Inspired by Renaissance thinking and supported both culturally and financially by their Queen, Elizabethan playwrights were able to explore an unprecedentedly diverse range of stories, ideas, and characters.

With the rise of the Renaissance, morality plays gave way to the more diverse themes and complex characters of Elizabethan theatre.

With a world of new themes to tackle, Elizabethan theatre came to be defined largely by its interest in philosophy, psychology, and humanism. As plays were relieved of the need to teach a moral lesson, playwrights began to develop flawed heroes and immoral characters, and theatre was made with the aim to represent all aspects of the human experience. Elizabethan theatre developed its own style, too: plots were set in foreign lands, playwrights infused their tragedies with elements of comedy, and plays employed the use of conventions like soliloquys, asides, eavesdropping, and disguises.

In 1603, about halfway through Shakespeare's professional playwriting career, Queen Elizabeth's death prompted James I to ascend the throne; this marked the beginning of the Jacobean era. From his aunt's reign, James inherited an era of political peace and a thriving English theatre. Inspired by the expansive and humanist themes of Elizabethan theatre, English audiences developed a growing appetite for realism, and playwrights dared to explore the darker and more "realistic" side of humanity and human nature. Jacobean theatre developed a style of its own: its plays were more cynical and pessimistic, reveled in violence and revenge fantasies, and often parodied or satirized leaders, governments, and societal constructs. Whereas the Renaissance's fascination with ancient Greece and Rome might have inspired Elizabethan playwrights to set their stories in faraway lands, the practice continued through the Jacobean era, possibly because foreign settings might protect playwrights by obscuring the identities of the royals they mocked. While tragedy bloomed in this era, sensationalism and spectacle grew in popularity, too; masques, musical interludes using lavish costumes and sets, can be seen in several of Shakespeare's Jacobean-era works, including *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. *Pericles* is without much of the Jacobean era's darker flavor, but its spectacle, more fast-paced and episodic plot, and somewhat less nuanced characters might be considered "of the time."

Usually performed in extravagant costumes and including musical interludes, Act 4, Scne 1 of The Tempest is a great example of a Jacobean masque.

Crossing Boundaries and Bending Genres

Pericles' place in the canon

Shakespeare was capable of holding his own against the changing tides of his audience, and not all of his plays are perfect reflections of popular styles: gory, vengeful *Titus Andronicus* was written in the Elizabethan era, while *The Tempest* is a beam of light in the Jacobean period. *Pericles* is far from a typically broody and blood-soaked Jacobean play, but the artistic climate of the time might still give us some clues.

Beginning around 1601, with *Troilus and Cressida,* Shakespeare's writing takes a darker turn; for a while he produces mainly tragedies, including *Othello*, *King Lear, Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra,* and even the comedies peppered between them take on decidedly darker themes. While this could simply be attributed to a Jacobean taste for the tragic, historians also believe these plays may indicate a period of depression following the death of Shakespeare's father. Then, around 1608, *Pericles* breaks the spell. Though not without its fair share of sorrow and loss, the play's whimsy, taste for adventure, and joyous reunions provide a stark contrast to the gloom of much of Shakespeare's recent writing. This spirit carries through to the next of his plays, and in the years that follow, Shakespeare writes his Romances. Genre-defying enough to necessitate a category of their own, the Romances are fantastical, expansive plays, touching on mystical and supernatural elements as much as questions of family and redemption. From this angle, *Pericles* plays an incredibly important role in the canon: the play could be considered a springboard into the complexity and playful experimentation of *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest,* the first in a series of love letters that serve as Shakespeare's goodbye to the theatre.

Familiar Journeys

Shakespeare's sources and inspiration

Many of Shakespeare's plays are re-imaginings of existing stories, which stick to or deviate from their source material to varying degrees. *Pericles* is a very close re-telling of the legend of Apollonius, King of Tyre, which remained widely popular from the Middle Ages into Shakespeare's day. Scholars agree that Shakespeare drew heavily from *Confessio Amantis,* a 33,000-line epic poem written in the 1300s by a contemporary of Gregory Chaucer: John Gower. If that name sounds familiar, it's because our ensemble is the divided form of a character of the same name: Shakespeare writes Gower in as the play's narrator, a sort of literary ancestor who guides us through his story. While the play follows Gower's version of the legend very closely, there are some notable differences: *Pericles* seems to provide Marina with more agency, as it is originally her constant weeping that drives her would-be customers away and preserves her virginity, and in an interesting departure from both the original tale and Jacobean tastes, Shakespeare's Prince of Tyre does not personally enact revenge on Cleon and Dionyza.

Other potential influences include Plutarch, a frequent source of inspiration for Shakespeare, and Sir Philip Sidney's poem "Arcadia," which may have given him the name Pericles.

Tracking Shakespeare's Co-Captain

Pericles and debated authorship

There's evidence that Shakespeare collaborated to some degree on most of his plays, but it could be argued that co-authorship is especially apparent in Pericles – while the possibility of collaboration is an ongoing debate for some of Shakespeare's works, most scholars agree that it's true of our play. A strong piece of evidence is the idea that *Pericles* can essentially be split into two "halves," and it's likely that a collaborator is responsible for the play's first two acts, while Shakespeare wrote the last three. *Pericles* was not formally attributed to William Shakespeare until almost fifty years after his death, much of the surrounding confusion caused by the fact that early recordings of the play are extremely illegible.

It is this confusion that points to George Wilkins as Shakespeare's most likely co-captain. Wilkins, a playwright associated with Shakespeare's company the King's Men – and a somewhat shady character with a rich criminal history – is credited as the author of *The Painful Adventures of Pericles, Prynce of Tyre*. Published in 1608, Wilkins' novel mirrors our play extremely closely, and while we can't be absolutely certain which came first, it is thought that *Pericles* premiered a year or two before the novel's publication.

Glossary

Pg.	Term	Pronunciation	Definition
4	Fere	*Fear*	Spouse
4	Wight	*Wite*	A living being, sometimes used to refer to an unfortunate or unlucky person
5	Hesperides	*hes-pear-i-deez*	In Greek mythology, nymphs of the evening and sunsets
7	"Why cloud they not their sights perpetually"		Likely a reference to Oedipus, who blinds himself after realizing that he has married his mother
7	Viol	*vye-uhl*	A Renaissance and Baroque-era instrument, similar to a viola or violin
7	Expound		Explain in detail
7	Jove		Another name for Jupiter, the King of the Roman Gods
9	Succor	*suh-kr*	Assistance or support
10	Ostent	*aw-stent*	Appearance
10	Bellows		An instrument used to blow air into a fire
10	Lading	*lay-ding*	The process of loading a ship with cargo
11	Propagate		To breed (usually plants or animals); to spread
12	Reprovest	*ree-prove-ist*	A form of "reprove" – to reprimand or scold
14	Indenture		A binding agreement
17	Superfluous	*soo-PEAR-flu-uss*	Unnecessary
19	Trojan horse		In the Trojan War, the Greek army hid troops in a giant wooden horse, which they rolled into the city of Troy to take their enemies by surprise. The term "trojan horse" commonly refers to something deceptive, meant to defeat from within.
20	Benison		Blessing
20	Speken	*speh-kin*	A Middle English form of the word "speak"
21	Pelf		Money
23	Sexton		Groundskeeper of a church and/or graveyard
23	Belfry	*bell-free*	The part of a church's steeple that holds the bell
23	Finny		Fish-like
27	Condolements	*kun-DOLE-mints*	Condolences; empathy for another's sorrow
27	Vails		The act of removing one's hat to show respect
29	Whipstock		Handle of a whip

29	Lance		A thrusting weapon used by warriors on horseback, somewhat similar to a spear
31	Cates		Fine foods or delicacies
31	Viands	*vye-unds*	Food items
32	Proffer	*PRAW-fur*	Offer or propose
38	Peremptory	*per-EMP-tor-ee*	Demanding immediate attention or compliance
41	Rout	*Rhymes with "doubt"*	A disorderly retreat of defeated troops
41	Eyne	*Rhymes with "fine"*	Eyes
41	Blither		Long-winded, meaningless talk (check)**
41	Drouth		Thirst or drought
41	Maidenhead		Virginity
41	Eche	*each*	Make greater or larger
41	Dern		Dire or determined
41	Coigns	*coins*	Corners
44	Bolins	*bow-lines*	Bowlines, ropes attached to a ship's sail
45	Caulked		Sealed with waterproof filler
45	Bitumed		Sealed with a tarry, black, asphalt-like substance
52	Recompense		Make amends
53	Votaress		A woman who has devoted her life to religious service, like a monk or nun
55	Tellus		Latin for "Earth"
56	Bereave		To be deprived of a loved one, usually after their death
56	Paragon		The perfect example or ideal form of something; i.e. "She's a paragon of kindness"
60	Chequins	*check-IN*	An old form of Italian currency
65	Sojourner	*SO-jer-ner*	Someone who resides in a place temporarily
67	Approbation		Approval
67	Malkin		An untidy, unkempt woman
68	Cockles		Small shellfish
69	Sackcloth		A very course, rough woven fabric
69	Thetis	*thee-tis*	From Greek mythology, a sea nymph or goddess of water, and the mother of Achilles
70	Vestals		Refers to vestal virgins, Roman priestesses of the goddess Vesta who took vows of chastity
70	Rutting		Promiscuous sexual activity
71	Priapus	*PRY-a-pus*	Greek and Roman god of male procreation
71	Fitment		Something that suits or fits
72	Cavaliers	*ca-vuh-leers*	Knights
72	Lown	*Rhymes with "gown"*	Peace and quiet
72	Baggage		Slang for a "loose woman" or prostitute

75	Sage		Wise
76	Gelded		Castrated, or in a double-meaning, stripped of one's liveliness or vigor
78	Coistrel	*koi-stril*	Scoundrel; a dishonest, immoral person
78	Tib		Slang for a girl or prostitute
78	Choleric	*caw-ler-ic*	Bad-tempered, easily angered
81	Prorogue	*Rhymes with "vogue"*	End, discontinue, dissolve
82	Distemperature		Disordered in terms of health, mind, or temper
83	Graff		A trench, ditch, or canal, often used in building moats
84	Malign	*muh-line*	Slander or degrade
84	Derivation		Coming from an origin or source
91	Eftsoons		Soon, in a moment
92	Argentine	*AR-jen-TYNE*	Resembling (or made of) silver
93	Licentious	*lye-sen-chus*	Sexually promiscuous