



## Pericles (Vol. 51) - Sexuality And Tradition

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### SEXUALITY AND TRADITION

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[In the essay below, Stockholder reveals the thematic ties between *Pericles*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, arguing that the plays reflect Shakespeare's views on gender roles, sex, and power,]

The central importance of the family to Shakespeare's plays has been discussed recently by many critics, notably by C. L. Barber who sees religious issues replacing domestic ones as the focus of meaning for Shakespeare's time. He argues that the consequent emotional pressure on the family and particularly on women gave rise to the conflicts that shaped the tragedies. Though his understanding of the problems needing resolution differs from more traditional readings, he agrees with both traditional and with feminist and psychoanalytic critics that the last plays portray resolutions to the conflicts that torment Shakespeare's tragic protagonists.<sup>1</sup> In this essay I will argue through a detailed comparison of *Pericles* to *Hamlet* and *King Lear* that the last plays do not resolve, but rather conceal the conflicts that shape the tragedies, and that the relations among these plays decisively indicate that Shakespeare was entrapped in the attitudes toward sexuality and women with which his protagonists struggle. I hope to show that Shakespeare not only struggled within, rather than coolly portrayed, the ideas and attitudes toward sexuality and women that he inherited from his time, but that these attitudes were also central to his portrayal of issues pertinent to the problems of rule and authority in the commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> The four last plays have many characteristics in common, but I choose to concentrate on *Pericles* both because its parallels to *Hamlet* and *King Lear* are particularly striking, and because its very flaws and unevenness make more visible the impulses that generate the characteristics shared with the more polished *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale* and *Tempest*. Also, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, pinnacles of Shakespeare's early and later achievement, mark stages in a progress from the naturalistic character portrayal of the earlier play through the mixture of naturalism and Manichean symbolism of the later, to the symbolic mode of the late plays that give only devious expression to the passions that shaped the tragedies.

Parallels between the relatively naturalistic worlds of the two tragedies and the highly symbolic world of *Pericles* make it possible to see the three plays as marking stages of a single emotional and intellectual trajectory. That trajectory extended from the tragedies in which wicked women increasingly came to represent evil and corruption, and good women came to represent a redemptive virtue which alone could make possible viable human relations in family, polity and cosmos. The polarized symbolic lading of female figures stressed the naturalistic framework and psychology of the tragedies until Shakespeare abandoned them in favor of the highly symbolic plots, and relatively single-dimensional characters and remote affect of the late romances. These plays rely on quasi-magical events to achieve a vision of love, family and polity redeemed by a radiantly pure woman coupled with a man of proven worthiness. However, the symbolic action and single-dimensional characters reveal Shakespeare's retreat rather than his release from the associations of sexual corruption and cruelty that cling to images of women. These associations, further, find their primary expression in either overt or covert incest. As this warping of sexuality invades the heart of Shakespeare's

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portrayals of families it also turns the family, for him the model and source of psychic, political and divine hierarchical harmony, into a nightmare vision in which humanity "preys upon itself like monsters of the deep."

This triangulated reading of the parallels in *Pericles* to *Hamlet* on the one hand and to *King Lear* on the other will function in two directions. Reading *Pericles* in the light of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* allows the light that such a reading emits to play back on features of the earlier plays that otherwise remain in the shadows. Both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* are predominantly naturalistic plays in the sense that the events comprising them do not violate our ordinary sense of causality. The probability with which events flow from the initiating circumstances or "givens" of the works can obscure the emotional or ideological significance of both the events and the initiating circumstances. The dream-like atmosphere of *Pericles* encourages us to interpret the quasimagical events as symbolic of mental, spiritual or emotional states. Therefore the clearly symbolic events of the later play which parallel the seemingly naturalistic events in earlier plays reveal the emotional and ideological significance of the tragedies. Conversely, this approach allows us to see in the probable plots of the tragedies the emotional forces lying hidden in the improbable events and Neo-platonic ideology of *Pericles*.

The situation in which Pericles initially finds himself has strong parallels to that which Hamlet confronts. The ghost calls upon Hamlet to cleanse Denmark of the pollution spreading from his mother's incestuous bed, while Pericles, having discovered the incest between Antiochus and his daughter, finds his country endangered by Antiochus' wrath. Though Hamlet confronts incest more immediately than does Pericles, both react with fear and melancholy, and both must leave their respective countries to fulfill their mission. As well, we encounter both figures as princes rather than as kings. Hamlet's filial status does not overtly signify unwillingness to assume his own maturity. Rather, the circumstances that have deprived him of his throne—Claudius' murder of King Hamlet, his marriage to Gertrude and election to the throne—appear as plot givens. But these broad parallels suggest that the external circumstance also expresses Hamlet's character, a suggestion borne out as well by some structural relations within the play itself. One such relation is the parallel between Fortinbras and Hamlet, both sons of warrior fathers. Fortinbras is also a prince rather than a king, though no reason accounts for his uncle sitting on Norway's throne. The unexplained parallel emphasizes the contrast between Hamlet's and Fortinbras' attitudes toward their fathers' martial values. Fortinbras, who espouses his father's values, acquires full authority at more or less the same time as Claudius' death, which would have empowered Hamlet had he lived. Unlike both Fortinbras and Laertes, Hamlet never makes a bid for power by leading an army to Denmark. Both Fortinbras and Laertes are openly ambitious, while Hamlet's ambition, which he half acknowledges to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, is obscured by the attention he focuses on avenging, or on failing to avenge, his father's death.

The contrast emphasized by the parallel between Fortinbras and Hamlet relates Hamlet's ambivalent desire to be king to his ambivalence about the martial values his father represents. Though without as much emphasis, Hamlet is as sharply contrasted to Fortinbras as is Prince Hal, on the one hand, and Falstaff on the other, to Hotspur. Whereas Hal wins Hotspur's honors from him before transcending the Feudal ethos on which they are based as he becomes King, Hamlet values the scholar Horatio for having so well "comingled" his "blood and judgment." And as Falstaff, as he contemplates the honorable but dead Hotspur, congratulates himself for remaining alive, Hamlet, though in a different tone, pits the value of honor against the life lost in its pursuit, when he wonders at Fortinbras' thoughtless risk of his own and others' lives "even for an eggshell" (IV.iv.53).<sup>3</sup> While he calls himself a coward in comparison to Fortinbras, he also reflects that "Sure he that made us with such large discourse, / Looking before and after, gave us not / That capability and godlike reason / To rust in us unus'd" (IV.iv.36-39). The combination of Hamlet's intellectual distance from his father's values, and his initial eagerness to "sweep to [his] revenge" shows him as a man divided: on the one hand he judges himself by his father's standards, while on the other he undermines his self-esteem by questioning the standard on which that judgement is based.

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The circumstances that Hamlet confronts, and the play's total structure, make military honor the proof of worthiness to rise from filial to paternal status, and from subject to monarch. Hamlet's refusal of martial values therefore renders him in his own eyes unworthy of the crown he seeks. He resolves that conflict only when, despite having had the opportunity, which Claudius previously denied him, to raise an army while out of the country, he declares himself as "Hamlet the Dane," come "naked" (V.i.251) to the kingdom. Having rendered himself defenseless, his definition of himself as the Dane ironically anticipates his death rather than his coronation. Rather than assume authority, he asserts his regal rights only in the dying words by which he gives Denmark's throne to Norway under Fortinbras. Thereby he not only undoes Claudius' diplomacy; he also reverses his father's previous victory over Norway. In a doubly ironic twist Hamlet revenges himself on an idealized father (whose ghost would presumably forever squeak and gibber in the streets of a Denmark ruled by a Norwegian king) by conferring the kingdom upon the son of his father's enemy. The irony is pointed when Hamlet receives posthumously from Fortinbras the "solder's music and the rite of war" against which he defined himself.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is Ophelia's grave beside which Hamlet resolves the conflicts among his sense of unworthiness, his animosity toward his father that generates it, and his ambition by simultaneously declaring his sovereignty and his powerlessness. By claiming Ophelia in the grave to which his nakedness will shortly bring him, he intertwines assuming political sovereignty and personal maturity with assuming husband- and fatherhood. The strong parallels between *Hamlet* and *Pericles* will further suggest that Hamlet's dual ambivalence, that can be resolved only by dying, joins to his unacknowledged hatred of his father, his unacknowledged disgust with his own and women's sexuality.

At the beginning of his play *Pericles*, like Hamlet, is also a prince rather than a king, despite his father having had that title. The omission of any external circumstance to account for his not having fully succeeded his father, along with the generally mythological aura of the play, more directly than *Hamlet* suggests that *Pericles'* princely status represents his inner unreadiness to assume full maturity. Furthermore, the play's action overtly brings into a single symbolic unit the roles, only tangentially related for Hamlet, of king, father and husband. Until *Pericles* has found a bride and fathered a child he does not assume authority.

In the first stage of his journey *Pericles* encounters in Antiochus and his daughter an externalized and distanced version of the "damned" incest that suffuses Hamlet's world with pestilent vapors. Confronting their riddle, *Pericles* is in the double-bind that for Freud characterizes the human condition—either guilty of incest, or if not, then plagued with guilty desire. *Pericles* will die if he cannot solve the riddle of Antiochus' incest, but by solving it he first incurs a Hamlet-like melancholy, and then Antiochus' murderous wrath. The combination of his initially mysterious melancholy and the danger he confronts from Antiochus by which he later explains it, suggests in a schematic way Hamlet's melancholy and Claudius' threat to his life.

Hamlet differs from *Pericles* in that he experiences himself closer to and implicated in the disease of his world. He fears that his imagination might be "as foul as Vulcan's stithy" (III.ii.84), while *Pericles'* figure remains separate from the evil he confronts. *Pericles'* quest for a bride, which fills the first half of his play, highlights Hamlet's relation to Ophelia, which, though pervasive, is obscured by the political events that shape the plot. The significance of the seemingly fortuitous connection between Hamlet's loss of Ophelia and of a kingdom emerges in the retrospective light of *Pericles'* story. Conversely, Hamlet's possibly foul imagination, his fascinated loathing of his mother's sexuality and disgust with Ophelia's, and his doubts about his courage are overt, while *Pericles*, defining himself as courageous and pure, confronts more unambiguously evil figures. But the parallels between the more naturalistic action of *Hamlet* and the symbolic action of *Pericles* indicate that Antiochus represents both *Pericles'* association of sexuality with incest and with fear of paternal reprisal. The suffering he undergoes, apparently through misfortune, then, as for Leontes' in the *Winter's Tale*, constitutes a penance for unacknowledged crimes, designed to render him worthy of wife, child and kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

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Having encountered an externalized form of his incestuous longings in Antiochus and his daughter, Pericles next encounters an externalized image of the emotional consequences of having associated sexuality with incest. It is as though Hamlet's inner wasteland, that momentarily afflicted Pericles, generates the blighted city of Tarsus. Pericles evades his emotional dilemma by casting himself as princely benefactor who restores the wasteland, as Hamlet was to have cleansed Denmark. But the emotional inadequacy of symbolic action appears in the shipwreck he suffers on leaving Tarsus, which casts him on the shores of Pentapolis divested of his princely garments. Arriving "naked," like Hamlet on his return to Denmark, he receives from the sea his father's rusty armor, which permits him successfully to compete in the tourney for Thaisa's hand. The juxtaposition of events shows him, like Hamlet, associating martial prowess with the paternal approval that allows him to win a bride.

The significance of the parallels as well as the differences between the two plays appears in the analogy between the scene in which Pericles regains his father's armor and the grave-digger scene in *Hamlet*. Pericles encounters on the shores of Pentapolis three fishermen lamenting the shipwreck they have just witnessed. Like the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, though less wittily, they moralize on the human condition through the imagery of their trade. In further analogy to the gravediggers who unearth skulls, they, casting their net into the sea, retrieve Pericles' father's rusty armor, and, as the grave diggers acquaint Hamlet with Ophelia's death, so Pericles learns of the tourney from the fishermen, the prize for which is the king's daughter. As Pericles dons the armor he emphasizes its symbolic significance when he says that his

dead father did bequeath to me  
With this strict charge, even as he left his life,  
'Keep it, my Pericles, it hath been a shield  
'Twixt me and death'

(II.i.123-26)

Though nothing overtly indicates that Pericles was estranged from his father, the rusty armor suggests a loss more remote than the wreck Pericles has just survived. The dream-like quality of the entire configuration represents the restoration of a damaged relationship. That restoration joins in a single image Pericles' martial and marital success, which becomes the precondition for his intended return to the throne of Tyre. Pericles' marriage to Thaisa therefore results from his implied reconciliation to his father. That connection is made almost overt when Pericles is reminded of his own father by Simonides' regal bearing as he blesses their union. In the sequence Pericles, by reconciling himself to his father's values as represented in the armor, ceases to be the Hamlet-like figure whose association of sexuality with incest renders him impotent to wrest Antiochus' daughter from her father. In becoming instead the conquering hero he proves himself worthy of the king's daughter.<sup>6</sup>

As Pericles overhears and comments on the fishermen's wisdom, so Hamlet also overhears the gravediggers, comments on their acumen, and like Pericles from the fishermen, Hamlet too receives from the gravediggers a memento of his father, but one that symbolizes his rejection of rather than reconciliation to him. The clown establishes the significant connection between Yorick's skull, Hamlet's past, and King Hamlet's honor in war, when just prior to recovering Yorick's skull, he says that he has been a grave-maker from the day that "King Hamlet o'er came Fortinbras," which was "that very day that young Hamlet was born" (V.i.140, 142). Rather than his father's armor, Hamlet receives the skull of his father's jester, a role much closer than warrior to that which Hamlet plays. His jester's role, and the brooding mind it conceals, make him the antithesis to what we know of King Hamlet, the "valiant Hamlet/ (For so this side of our known world esteem'd him,)" (I.i.87-88). Because Hamlet rejects his father's values the gravedigger scene presages a different future for him than does the fisherman scene for Pericles. Instead of armor cast up by the sea to presage his martial victory, Hamlet receives as an omen of his own death the jester's skull; instead of winning a bride through proof of his valor he vies with Laertes for priority in grief for Ophelia's death, and sends the jester's skull "to my lady's

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chamber" (V.i.187). The fisherman scene in *Pericles* makes interdependent Pericles' escape from death, his achievement of husband- and fatherhood, and of a kingdom. The parallels between the two scenes reveal the integral relationship between Hamlet's failure to win a wife (except in the tomb), his failure to win a kingdom, his refusal of martial values, and his meditations upon and movement toward death.

These parallels invite a closer examination of the role of women in *Hamlet*, who at first glance seem to have little in common with the polarized female figures in *Pericles*. Gertrude and Ophelia, despite Hamlet's vision of them, are Shakespeare's most ordinary women. Though Hamlet surrounds them both with images of sexual foulness and corruption, their actions are those of persons who are trivial or frightened. They are so lightly drawn as to leave in question the state of their consciousness, but Gertrude at worst seems "frail," and the most severe reading of Ophelia leaves us with a girl who in confusion and fear betrays Hamlet's trust, and in further confused fear tries to redeem herself for that betrayal by secretly offering herself to him. However, though they are and feel themselves to be powerless, their sexuality is made to represent the something rotten in Denmark that pervades Hamlet's world and imagination. Though no shades either of mocking cruelty or of divine redemption, of hell or heaven, symbolically extend the resonance of their characters, they become emblematic of duplicity and depravity when Polonius and Claudius, having posed Ophelia with a prayer book to entrap Hamlet, moralize on the vignette. For Polonius she illustrates the way in which "devotion's visage" can conceal "the devil himself," and for Claudius she shows the "plastering art" that in concealing the "harlot's cheek" represents his soul. The play leaves a gap between their relatively trivial characters and the association of women's sexuality with betrayal, decay and death.<sup>7</sup>

That gap, along with the parallel circumstances, points to a similarity beneath the obvious differences between the women who populate the protagonists' worlds. Hamlet's mother's incestuous love of Claudius colors his view of all sexuality, necessarily including his own. He most closely approaches a sexual relationship when, disobeying the Ghost's command to leave Gertrude to heaven, he evokes verbally the "rank sweat" of Gertrude and Claudius' "enseamed bed" (III.iv.92) and their "reechy kisses" (II.iv.186). In urging Gertrude to be chaste he tries to cleanse his imagination of sexuality, since he can envision only an incestuous sexuality or sterile sexlessness. But unable to accept a sterile life, and unable to disassociate sexuality from incest, decay and death, he draws Ophelia into the "unweeded garden" of his incestuous imagination and claims her after she, decked in wild flowers, has found a "muddy death."

Pericles' confrontation with incest is at once clearer, and totally externalized. The murky vapors that surround and obscure *Hamlet* and invade its protagonist have solidified into the fairy-tale-like figures of Antiochus and his daughter, leaving to the figure of Pericles an untarnished virtuous heroism. But both figures, to begin their journeys toward maturity, must disentangle sexuality from incest. Hamlet's discovery of an incestuously polluted bed at the center of a sordid world is rendered with emotional probability. In *Pericles* the two components are separated into distinct episodes. Pericles, by solving Antiochus' not too difficult riddle and bringing upon himself the wrath of the competing father, flees his country in order to protect it, only to encounter the mysteriously blighted country of Tarsus. However, the symbolic meaning of that mystery later emerges when Dionyza plans to murder Pericles' daughter, Marina. As the evil woman whose inner corruption emanates blight and corruption, she functions similarly to the more naturalistic figure of Gertrude and to the blacker, more symbolic figures of Goneril and Regan—as well as, to look further down the road, to the more fairy-tale-like figures of Cymbeline's queen and Sycorax.

One detail in particular brings the women in the two plays, so differently characterized, into meaningful imaginative configuration. When Ophelia has refused to see Hamlet and returned his letters, she has betrayed Hamlet's love to the interests of Polonius's political strategies. Hamlet knows that much by the time he encounters Ophelia reading her prayer book, whether or not he also knows that she at that moment is a willing decoy. And whether or not such knowledge would justify his harshness, she, having allowed her attractions to be prostituted to political ends, makes appropriate Hamlet's demand that she get to a nunnery. That phrase, emphasized by repetition, contains the polarized extremities in which Hamlet sees Gertrude's sexuality. Its

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literal level couples sexual purity with a sterile life, while its colloquial meaning couples sexuality with the corruption and decay that occur when the sun "being a god kissing carrion" breeds "maggots in a dead dog" (II.ii. 180-83). Those extremes define Hamlet's sexual imagination, making Gertrude's description of the "dead men's fingers" that "liberal shepherds give a grosser name" (IV.vii. 169-70) and that clung to the drowning Ophelia, an appropriate token of Hamlet's relation to his sexuality. He cannot conceive of a middle-ground whereon sexuality can be both loving and healthily generative.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore appropriate to Hamlet's character that his version of Pericles' tourney for Thaisa is his combat with Laertes at Ophelia's grave, and that his trajectory ends at a point that corresponds to Pericles' loss of Thaisa at sea.

In *Pericles* the opposing images contained in Hamlet's single phrase separately expand into fully developed action. Thaisa, in order to avoid being married to any knight but Pericles, has previously vowed to become a priestess of Diana. As though her words must be fulfilled, she apparently dies in childbirth during a tempest, is thrown into the waves which wash her up on the shores of Ephesus, where for fourteen years she becomes a priestess, living as chastely as Hamlet desired that Gertrude should. In the absence of an explanation for her failure even to think of rejoining Pericles, the literal nunnery acquires symbolic resonance. Meanwhile Marina, having been rescued from Dionyza by pirates who sell her to a bawdy house in Mitylene, gets herself to a nunnery in its colloquial sense. However, her virtue glows so radiantly that, rather than being besmirched, it cleanses the brothel. All of the final restorative action, including the destruction of Cleon and Dionyza's corrupt kingdom, pivots on her purity, the radiance of which alone can purify men's imagination of their own and women's sexuality. Reading this expansion of Hamlet's image back into *Hamlet* shows that Hamlet's world and mind can be cleansed only by female virtue so transcendently pure that it can be imagined only in a world governed by something other than ordinary causality. Ordinary women in probable worlds can never suffice, and therefore no Hamlet can acquire a wife and become king of an ordinarily healthy and fertile kingdom.

The echo of Hamlet's words in the action of *Pericles* relates the women in *Hamlet* to those in *Pericles*. But the female figures that populate *Pericles* have more in common with those in *King Lear* though they are even less probable and more radically polarized between good and evil. Marina clearly corresponds to Cordelia. Like Cordelia she is separated from her father, and like her she "redeems nature from the general curse/ which twain have brought her to" (IV.vi.207-08). Though the evil women, Antiochus' daughter and Dionyza, are not kin to Marina, Dionyza's threat to Marina's life parallels Goneril and Regan's hatred of Cordelia and their contribution to her death.

The parallels between the women in *Pericles* and those in *King Lear* show that the associations of women with cruelty, obvious in the action and imagery of *King Lear*, are present, though submerged, in the later play. Pericles' visit to the blighted Tarsus, presided over by Dionyza, generates echoes of the cannibalistic horrors associated with sexuality and family in *King Lear*. As Pericles approaches Tarsus, Cleon says that "Those mothers who, to nuzzle up their babes, / Thought nought too curious, are ready now / To eat those little darlings whom they lov'd" (I.iv.41-44), an image that recalls Antiochus' riddle, "I am no viper, yet I feed / On mother's flesh which did me breed" (I.i.64-65). In his rage at Cordelia, Lear says that she will be as welcome to his bosom as "The barbarous Scythian, / Or he that makes his generation messes / To gorge his appetite" (I.i.116-18). The confused generational reversal of the whole play, reflected in the ambiguity of this line, aligns that image with those of Goneril and Regan as pelicans, wolves and foxes. Both plays associate the family with cannibalistic images of children devouring parents and of parents devouring children.

The incestuous elements of *King Lear* are more submerged than they are in *Pericles*. The "kind nursery" (II.i.123) that Lear anticipated with Cordelia is more suggestive of pre-oedipal infantile feelings. However, the overt incest of *Pericles* casts into relief the eroticism of *King Lear*, which in view of the fact that Lear confronts only daughters-cum-mothers can not be other than incestuous. Lear's abdication is associated with Cordelia's marriage by both events composing a single occasion. Lear emphasizes the connection between the two events by describing the ways in which the "vines of France and milk of Burgundy" (I.i.84) strive for

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Cordelia's hand, as he asks for her declaration of love. Some incestuous suggestion appears when, despite declaring herself inarticulate, Cordelia echoes the marriage ceremony in saying that she will "obey you, love you, and most honour you" (I.i.98). The implied incestuous feeling becomes more overt when Lear says that he will go to Cordelia "like a smug bridegroom" (IV.vi.200). Cordelia's figure in this way acquires tinges of incestuous sexuality, but her exile from the stage preserves her halo. The association of corrupt sexuality and sadistic cruelty with incest, as well as with illegitimately exercised authority, appears instead in the configuration formed by Goneril and Regan's abuse of power and their convoluted sexual relationship to Edmund.

The incest underlying Lear's vision of both sexuality and corrupt authority appears when Lear, on the heath, enjoins the gods to discover and punish the various crimes of their enemies. The play makes overt all the crimes, save only the incestuous "similar of virtue" (HI.ii.54). Lear's abrupt mention of incest explains the gap in logic between his invocation of social evils and his self-justifying declaration that he is "more sinn'd against than sinning" (III.ii.59). The dramatic context, in which the storm is both an image of his rage and the consequence of his failings as King, makes his own the "pent-up" guilts that he says have generated the punishing storm. As though in horrified recoil from the pit of shame opened by his catalog of sins, instead of confessing his sins, he proclaims his relative innocence. The evil in himself, the knowledge of which he here avoids, is related to the dominant images of evil in the play, the figures of Goneril and Regan, whose sexuality is equated with the devil: "But to the girdle do the gods inherit, / Beneath is all the fiend's" (IV.vi. 128-29). But as it was Lear's flesh that "begot these pelican daughters," so Lear's psyche is reflected in the clustered association of cruelty, misused authority and illicit sexuality which comprises their figures.<sup>9</sup> After having acknowledged his abuse of authority and penetrated the foul smells of his own birth through the "sulphurous pit" beneath women's girdles, he demands an "ounce of civet" to "sweeten" his imagination (IV.vi. 133-34). The imagery suggests that he exiled Cordelia to keep her uncontaminated by his imagination which, like Hamlet's, is as "foul as Vulcan's stithy." Proximity to him would befoul her image, and rob nature of the ideal feminine purity that alone can redeem both male sexuality and authority.<sup>10</sup> The parallels of *Pericles to King Lear* show that the tempests, shipwrecks and betrayals by which Pericles loses both Thaisa and Marina—so soon after acquiring them—conceal and express his continuing incapacity to remain close to them without sully the associated image of redeeming purity. The symbolic step he made toward women and authority when he accepted his father's armor and won Thaisa's hand has failed to excise from his vision of women and family hidden associations with incest and its correlate infusion of all sexuality with the odor of disease and crime.

The later action of *Pericles* parallels that in *King Lear* as the early action parallels that in *Hamlet*. The transition occurs when Simonides pretends displeasure with Thaisa for being so "absolute" in her choice of Pericles, and for "Not minding whether I dislike or no" (II.v.19-20). Daughter and father each pretend to frustrate the other's desire in a playful and somewhat flirtatious version of Cordelia's catastrophic disobedience. Simonides' mock-tyranny is a pale version of Lear's rage at Cordelia for giving him only "half [her] love." Having lost Cordelia to another king, Lear embarks on an inner journey through desolate isolation and victimization. Instead of dying, like Hamlet, when he loses his women, Pericles passes in an instant from the threshold of a mature sovereignty and fatherhood to a Lear-like simulacrum of old age and impotence. Having been with Thaisa only long enough for her to bear a child, he loses her to a tempest, and he loses his daughter Marina, who will become a double of Thaisa, by giving her away to Dionyza and Cleon. Having left Marina at Tarsus, he declares that "Till she be married, madam, / By bright Diana, whom we honour all / Unscissor'd shall this hair of mine remain, / Though I show ill in't" (III.iii.27-30). The images that describe Pericles when he visits what he believes to be Marina's tomb in Tarsus, though they lack the deep resonance of those in *King Lear*, recall Lear's travail on the heath. Gower tells us that Pericles swears "Never to wash his face, nor cut his hairs. / He puts on sackcloth, and to sea. He bears / A tempest, which his mortal vessel tears, / And yet he rides it out" (IV.iv.27-31). The disproportion between the seemingly casual way in which he decides to leave Marina at Tarsus and the depths of feeling suggested by his symbolic entry into old age suggests that the action represents otherwise unexpressed emotion. Lear's fierce ambivalence toward Cordelia,

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his quick reversal from a warm vision of himself in her care, to one of himself as the "Barbarous Scythian," has been reduced to Pericles' minor uncertainty about whether to press on to Tyre or to leave Marina at Tarsus, and Lear's victimization by his cruel daughters has similarly been reduced to Pericles' self-imposed disfiguration. The events too are softened, but remain parallel. Cordelia's death corresponds both to Thaisa's seeming death and to Marina's near death at Dionyza's hands.

While Pericles for a second time wanders the seas, to be brought by good fortune or secret fate to the shores of Mitylene, Marina has demonstrated in the brothel her fierce Cordelia-like integrity that threatens to put bawdy-houses out of business. She wins the admiration of the governor Lysimachus by being able, like Miranda, to make men "as cold as a snowball" (IV.vi. 140). The ambiguity that surrounds Simonides in relation to his daughter also surrounds Lysimachus in relation to Marina, for though he declares that no low intention brought him to the brothel, it is not clear what else might have done so. However, only after Marina's shimmering purity has proven its power to transform men does Pericles arrive at Mitylene to be discovered in prostrate catatonia by Lysimachus and other lords. Their discovery of him parallels the soldier's discovery of Lear decked in wild flowers, and just as Cordelia rains on Lear the medicinal drops of her compassionate tears, so Marina's beatific virtue that cleanses men's low sexuality is to Pericles the "sacred physic" that heals both body and soul. Both scenes are suffused with the aura of transformation and regeneration. Pericles asks Marina, "But are you flesh and blood?" (V.i.152) as Lear wonders if he is already in heaven, and both figures are prepared in fresh garments for regenerative sleep amidst healing music.

Lear challenges guilt and approaches, for a blissful moment before her death, a lover-like union with Cordelia, thereby disassociating sexuality, for that moment, from guilt and punitive cruelty. That union hints at the restored youth that will be bestowed on Pericles when Lear says "I kill'd the slave that was a-hanging thee," and "I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion / I would have made them skip" (V.iii.274, 276-77). But whereas Lear dies dreaming that Cordelia lives, Pericles wakes to the "rarest dream" of Marina's actual life, and is restored to youth when he washes, shaves and is reunited, guided in a dream-vision by the chaste Diana to Thaisa, Marina's double as well as her mother. Symbolically their reunion restores both inner and outer wastelands by rescuing sexuality and fertility from the corruption of the brothel, and purity from the sterility of the nunnery. But only amidst psychologically improbable characters and fantastic events can Pericles have a wife. A trace of the same feelings that in a probable world would associate women with incest and corrupt authority appears when Pericles decides not to return with Thaisa to Tyre as King and Queen. Instead Marina and Lysimachus will reign there while he and Thaisa will rule in Pentapolis. Like many other events of the play—the many years during which Pericles leaves Marina in Tarsus, Thaisa's long sojourn in the nunnery—this one also lacks a naturalistic explanation. That gap, when filled with the motivations suggested by the parallels among the plays, allows us to see Pericles as one who secretly is identified with the evil figures who appear to be external to him. He cannot return to his own kingdom and assume his rightful power because ideological solutions do not resolve psychic dilemmas.

The foregoing discussion of the psychological dynamics of these plays has not assumed authorial intention. But parallels among the motifs that are clearly within Shakespeare's conscious intentions support this comparative reading. Hamlet, in his probable world, describes his father, and by implication himself, as a moderately good man trying to survive amidst corruption and duplicity. Only at the end does he place his trust in a divine providence that seems to assist him in accomplishing his mission. Both *King Lear* and *Pericles* shape their protagonists' fate around the question of whether the world makes manifest divine justice. The gothic chambers of Lear's relatively probable world, in which an extraordinarily good Cordelia can be defeated by the extraordinarily evil Goneril and Regan, echo with that question. Pericles' improbable world, at the center of which is Marina's power to sweeten the male imagination, leaves no question of the gods' justice. As Antiochus and his daughter received the "due and just reward" for their "monstrous lust" (Epilogue), when struck by lightning, so Cleon and Dionyza's outraged subjects burn them in their palace. But the very improbability of the events which assert divine justice casts doubt on its possibility, a doubt that also attaches to the emotional veracity of the envisioned restoration of love and family.



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Both on the abstract level of authority and justice, and on the more immediate one of sexuality and familial feeling, the visionary conclusion conceals the conflicts that shaped the tragedies. It reveals that for Shakespeare nature itself was the price of redeemed nature. Pericles conceals the aura of sex-loathing in the flattened and fairy-tale figures, but the parallels in character, action and language to that in the more emotionally immediate tragedies reveal that only the most strenuous control prevents the vision of radiant female perfection from betraying its origin in its own opposite. However, it implies no denigration to say that Shakespeare failed to give restored and transcendent life to the golden statues that emerged from Romeo and Juliet's tomb, for not even the greatest authors can stand outside of their history. Rather, I think that Shakespeare's struggle with the ideas and values of his time was deeper than that of ordinary mortals, and was transformed in his art into depictions, specifically, of the emotional cost for men of making women into symbols of good and evil, and, generally, of how humanity struggles in the toils of its own ideas and values.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> C. L. Barber, "Though that begetst him that did thee beget': Transformation in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*" *Shakespeare Survey*, 22 (1969), 59-68, and "The Family in Shakespeare's Development: Tragedy and Sacredness," in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed., Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore, 1980), pp. 188-202.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Kirsch, *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love* (Cambridge, 1981), argues that for Shakespeare "erotic disorder is disorder in the kingdom" (p. 148).

<sup>3</sup> All quotations are from the Arden Editions of Shakespeare's works.

<sup>4</sup> K. R. Eissler, in *Discourse on Hamlet and "Hamlet"* (New York, 1971), p. 113, thinks Hamlet's success in reaching maturity is represented by Fortinbras' accession to the crown.

<sup>5</sup> Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 212, sees the father-daughter incest as a projection of mother-son incestuous impulses, and sees Pericles as a guilty son punished by a providential tempest for sins not dramatized as his.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (New York, 1972), p. 217, argues as I do that in Thaisa and her father Pericles encounters a second version of Antiochus and his daughter.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Bamber in *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford, 1982), p. 78, also finds the gap between Gertrude's and Ophelia's portrayal and Hamlet's language significant of Hamlet's sexual hatred. She, however, sees his projections as signs of a disintegrating manhood.

<sup>8</sup> Many critics, drawing on the work of D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York, 1971) and others, see Hamlet's difficulty residing primarily in his failure to reconcile himself to women and to accept the feminine side of himself. See David Leverenz, "The Women in *Hamlet*: An Interpersonal View," *Signs*, 4 (Winter 1978), 291-308; Theodore Lidz, *Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet* (New York, 1975), p. 82; Bamber, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> The incestuous component of *King Lear* has been noted, in different ways, by many critics. See Myra Glazer Schotz, "The Great Unwritten Story: Mothers and Daughters in Shakespeare," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Boner (New York, 1980), p. 47; Meredith Skura, "Interpreting Posthumus' Dream from Above and Below: Psychoanalysts and Literary Critics," in *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Lorie Jerrell Leininger, in "The Miranda Trap; Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*," in *The Woman's Part, Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn R. Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, 1980), pp. 285-94, is critical of the symbolic freighting of chastity and lust to represent all virtue and vice in *The Tempest*.

## Lorraine Helms (essay date 1990)

SOURCE: "The Saint in the Brothel: Or, Eloquence Rewarded," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3, Fall, 1990, pp. 319-32.

[In the following essay, Helms traces the literary precedence of Pericles's Marina, discussing subtle differences in attitudes towards the commodification and patriarchal control of a woman's sexuality.]

The fifty-third declamation in Lazarus Piot's 1596 translation of Alexander Silvayn's *The Orator* tells a tale "of her who having killed a man being in the stewes, claimed for her chastity and innocencie to be an Abbesse." The narrative is prefaced by an imperative statement in the guise of a law: "The order of the religious women is such, as they must be pure, chast, and free from all crime, but the Abbesse must be the chastest of all the rest." The declamation that follows subjects this fictive law to a narrative that challenges its implicit definitions of chastity and purity: "It chanced that a certaine yoong Nunne of Naples was to saile into Sicilie to be an Abbesse there"; but en route she was captured by pirates, who sold her to a brothel. When clients were brought to her, she persuaded them to give her "the accustomed reward" while leaving her a virgin. A soldier who could not be so persuaded tried to rape her. She killed him with his own sword. She stood trial for murder and was acquitted. Then she sailed on to Sicily, where she "claimed for her chastity and innocencie to be an Abbesse."

Piot's declamation, printed as an analogue to Shakespeare's *Pericles* in Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, emerges from a nexus of legal, religious, literary, and rhetorical contexts that form the prehistory of the brothel scenes in *Pericles*.<sup>1</sup> The declamation was originally gathered among those of Seneca the Elder as the *controversia* of the *Sacerdos Prostituta*. Like the would-be abbess of Piot's declamation, the Senecan character of the Prostitute Priestess has been abducted by pirates, sold to a pimp, and held captive in a brothel. She has defended herself against rape, first through eloquence and then through homicide, killing the soldier who assaults her. Seneca's *controversia* ends inconclusively, for no court determines whether the Prostitute Priestess is fit for the order of the vestal virgins.<sup>2</sup>

The Senecan motif of the Prostitute Priestess reemerges in Greek romance, Christian hagiography, and Shakespearean drama. In exploring its history, I do not wish to study sources for the brothel scenes of *Pericles*, nor to place the motif within an unvarying discursive tradition. Rather, I intend to explore the relation between the cultural contexts and the structural transformations of the varied texts and performances in which the Prostitute Priestess appears. The Senecan declamation is part of the prehistory of tales of saints and princesses imprisoned in brothels; it reveals an ancient rhetoric of rape in the subtext of romance, legend, and drama. As the motif moves from the quasi-theatrical rhetorical setting of Roman declamation through a textual history in hagiography and romance to its theatrical representation on the Shakespearean stage, generic conventions transform the cultural work of the Prostitute Priestess. In the Senecan *controversia* the declaimers, having created a conflict between a law of religious chastity and a narrative of abduction, attempted rape, and homicide, then test their rhetorical skill by improvising arguments for or against the candidacy of the Prostitute Priestess. Their improvisations forestall narrative closure, continually renegotiating the ideological meaning of the rhetoric of rape. In the narratives of hagiography and romance, authorial closure almost effaces this open-ended rhetoric. The case of the Prostitute Priestess is closed. In *Pericles*, where a performance text again configures the resolution of the narrative, the case is altered. Marina reanimates the figure of the Prostitute Priestess, as the Shakespearean playtext reenacts the Senecan rhetoric

of rape.

## THE SENECAN RHECTORIC OF RAPE

The Roman schools of declamation, originally instituted to train advocates in deliberative and forensic rhetoric, had, under the Empire, become a venue for private performances before an elite audience of aficionados. The forensic oration became a fictional *controversia*, notorious for its artificial style and sensationalized themes; the rhetorical agon became a quasi-theatrical debate in which the declaimers sometimes spoke *ethicos*, in the character of the plaintiff or defendant in a case.<sup>3</sup>

The *controversiae* consisted of a real or fictional law, such as the pontifical rule about the priestess's chastity, and a *narratio*, a sketch of the facts in the case. The narrative is designed to expose conflicts and contradictions in the statute. Seeking their arguments in the gaps and seams of judicial discourse, the declaimers choose one side of the case to argue and then invent rhetorical *colores*, glosses that specify motive and circumstance. In hypothesizing an internal structure for external events, *colores* enable a judge to reach a just—or at least justifiable—decision. Unconstrained by the exigencies of actual cases, the declaimers devised sensationalized themes to test the coherence of real and fictive laws, competing for the most extravagant *colores* and the most ingenious *sententiae*.

Seneca the Elder transcribed the *controversiae* for his nephew, Seneca the Younger, who assimilated their *sententiae* and *colores* into his tragedies. Quintilian, Tacitus, Pliny, Petronius, and Juvenal all condemn the discourse of the declaimers for its self-indulgent delight in ornament and its wanton disregard of realism. "The declamations," Quintilian complains, "which we used to employ as foils wherewith to practise for the duels of the forum, have long since departed from the true form of pleading and, owing to the fact that they are composed solely with the design of giving pleasure, have become flaccid and nerveless: indeed, declaimers are guilty of exactly the same offence as slave-dealers who castrate boys in order to increase the attractions of their beauty."<sup>4</sup>

Senecan declamation emerges from the relentlessly patriarchal contexts of Roman rhetorical culture. Its practitioners as well as its critics structure their discourses through metaphors of gender and violence. The *controversiae* are misogynistic tales of terror that take place in a rhetorical heterocosm peopled by pirates, kidnapers, rapists, cruel stepmothers, and poisoners. Yet the improvisational theatricality of Senecan declamation complicates and to some extent compromises its reproduction of social and legal ideologies. Composed, as Quintilian complains, "solely with the design of giving pleasure," the ludic agon fragments forensic argument and denies juridical closure. In the *controversia* of the *Sacerdos Prostituta*, the narrative premise that interrogates the fictive statute exposes ideological gaps in the representational structure of the declamation itself. The statute reads: "A priestess must be chaste and of chaste [parents], pure and of pure [parents]." The accompanying narrative states:

A virgin was captured by pirates and sold; she was bought by a pimp and made a prostitute. When men came to her, she asked for alms. When she failed to get alms from a soldier who came to her, he struggled with her and tried to use force; she killed him. She was accused, acquitted and sent back to her family. She seeks a priesthood.

(1.2)

By asking whether there are any circumstances in which an enslaved prostitute can legally become a holy virgin, the declaimers disturb the cultural significations of female chastity and purity; they undermine the patriarchal distinction between virgin and whore by constructing a narrative that deliberately blurs it.

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At the center of this declamation lies the question of sexual pollution. In Seneca's transcription of the speech of Cestius Pius, the declaimer insists that the Prostitute Priestess has incurred *stuprum*, the defilement of illicit sexuality. Even if she has retained her virginity, her experience has irrevocably defiled her:

You offered yourself, a girl in a brothel. Even if nobody outraged you, the place itself did so [*locus ipse violavit*]. You offered yourself with harlots, beautified to please the populace, dressed in the clothes the pimp had provided. Your name hung at the door; you received the wages of sin [*pretia stupri*] . . . the hand that aspired to sacrifice to the gods took immoral gains.

(1.2.7)

For the prosecutors, *stuprum* is a material pollution transmitted through "the place itself." "Pollution rules," writes Mary Douglas, "by contrast with moral rules are unequivocal. They do not depend on intention or a nice balancing of rights and duties. The only material question is whether a forbidden contact has taken place or not."<sup>5</sup>

Pollution rules create sharp boundaries between the pure and the defiled body, boundaries that no question of motive and intention can penetrate. Another declaimer, Publius Asprenas, quarantines the polluted body of the Prostitute Priestess by policing the boundaries between the sacred space of the temple and the profane space of the brothel: "Once you enter a brothel, all temples are closed to you" (1.2.10). Publius Vinicius, also speaking against her, alludes to her motives only to dismiss their significance: "Do you regard yourself as chaste just because you are an unwilling whore?" (1.2.3).

The advocates of the Prostitute Priestess, however, posit an internal purity that eludes *stuprum*: "I guarantee," swears Pompeius Silo,

a priestess whom no bad fortune can make unchaste. Some women can be forced to it by slavery: she served barbarians and pirates, remaining inviolate in their hands. Some women can be depraved by the evil habits of a decadent age . . . she will remain chaste to the end. You may put her in a brothel: even through this she managed to carry her chastity away untouched.

(1.2.20)

While those who argue against her equate the woman's defilement with the material circumstances of her imprisonment, her advocates stress the discrepancy between her invincible chastity and the physical conditions of the brothel. By insisting on internal purity, they create a precondition for an argument based on rules of morality.<sup>6</sup>

In the arguments of those who speak against her, sexual defilement carries with it all other forms of pollution. Interpreting her act of homicide, Publius Asprenas argues: "You consorted with men who were murderers, smeared with human blood: hence, of course, your ability to kill a man" (1.2.9). Rather than survive by killing, a woman so defiled "could," as Publius Vinicius puts it, "do nothing more upright [*nihil honestius*] than to die" (1.2.3). If death demonstrates chastity, then the ability of the Prostitute Priestess to survive implies the *audacia* of sexual license, and her act of homicide convicts her of unchastity. The rapist then is innocent, and his intended victim becomes the criminal: "Was she justified in killing an innocent man who wanted to employ the body of a prostitute?" asks Latro. Although she was acquitted of homicide, her trial "showed not that she was pure but that the law could not touch her" (1.2.14).

Again, her advocates distinguish between her internal purity and the material circumstances of her captivity. Albucius presents the homicide in these *colores*:

There came a man of fierce and violent temperament, sent, I believe, by the gods themselves to put on display the chastity of one destined to be priestess, not to violate it. She told him to keep his hands off her holy body: "You must not dare to harm chastity that men preserve and gods look forward to." When he came rushing to his doom, she said: "Look, your weapon—you do not realise that it is in the cause of chastity that you carry it." And seizing the sword she drove it into her attacker's breast. Those same immortal gods took care that this deed of hers should not go unnoticed; an accuser turned up to bear witness to her chastity in the courts. No-one could believe a man had been killed by a woman, a youth by a girl, one armed by one unarmed. It was too great a feat for it to be supposed to have taken place without the aid of the immortal gods.

(1.2.18)

The Prostitute Priestess acts forcefully by seizing the soldier's weapon. With it she appropriates the phallic power to penetrate another's body. To minimize the risk of this appropriation, Albucius' *color* denies her agency. To credit the gods with the defense of her chastity validates the survival of the Prostitute Priestess without questioning the vulnerability of ordinary women.

Albucius' *color* closes the ideological gap that the figure of the Prostitute Priestess opens; but when the declamation was performed, it was only one among many rhetorical *colores*. The purpose of declamation was not to hold the mirror up to nature but to argue *in utramque partem*. In order to construct a narrative that pushes the legal dilemma to its most sensationalized extreme, the declaimers forgo patriarchal criteria for the realistic representation of women. They endow the Prostitute Priestess with the abilities to speak eloquently and kill ruthlessly. Eloquence and courage, arts and arms, Mercury and Mars: the Prostitute Priestess challenges the male monopoly of these qualities, endeavors, and symbols, and it is for this that she stands trial. The declaimers may call her speech either divine eloquence or meretricious wheedling, her martial skill either miraculous or murderous, and her survival either a triumph or a transgression. Yet the open structure of the declamation subversively suggests that a woman can survive and even triumph in the worst circumstances that the male imagination can devise for her. Consigned to the brothel, she may reinterpret prostitution; elected to the priesthood, she may reinterpret religion. The declaimers cannot debate their conflicting interpretations of their character's status without inadvertently raising the question of her self-interpretation.

## THE CASE IS CLOSED

The motif of the Prostitute Priestess has proved as resilient as the character herself, outlasting the legal and religious institutions in which the declamation originated. It endures in two major forms, each with many variants. One is the figure of the virgin martyr from Christian hagiography; the other is the kidnapped princess of Greek romance. As the hagiographers and romance writers adapt the theatricalized agon of rhetorical performance to narrative structures, they jettison the declamatory *argumentum in utramque partem*. Saints' lives and Greek romances present only one side of the argument, exerting narrative authority to close the case of the Prostitute Priestess.

The virgin martyrs, all beautiful and wellborn, are enslaved in brothels for refusing to worship pagan idols or for rejecting pagan suitors. *The Golden Legend* tells the tale of Agnes, who, at the age of thirteen, was sought in marriage by the son of the prefect of Rome. She refused the offer. She was, as punishment, sent to a brothel. But an angel surrounded her with a bright light. When men entered the brothel and perceived this radiance, they offered her reverence. The son of the prefect, like the soldier in the declamations, came to the brothel and tried to rape her. He dropped dead at the edge of the holy light. Although Agnes, through her

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prayers, successfully resuscitated her would-be rapist, the pagan priests insisted she be burned as a sorceress. But the fire would not burn her, for she prayed; and as she prayed, the flames lost their heat. Finally a lieutenant commanded that she be stabbed with a sword, and thus Agnes achieved her martyrdom.<sup>7</sup>

The saints' lives depart from the story of the Prostitute Priestess most obviously by replacing her act of homicide with martyrdom. Yet the hagiographers have incorporated the advocates' arguments into their narrative premises. Like Pompeius Silo, the hagiographers find that physical contact with the brothel and its inhabitants need not constitute loss of chastity. They also take up Albucius' hint that the Prostitute Priestess escapes miraculously, elaborating on the divine aid that enables a captive to avoid rape.

The hagiographers do not grant complete victory to the advocates, however. In one crucial particular they appear to have taken the prosecutor Publius Vinicius at his word: when placed in a brothel, a woman can do nothing more upright than to die. When this premise is incorporated into the narrative structure, the mortification of the virgin in the brothel becomes the foundation for her sanctification, implicitly challenging the Augustinian argument against the suicide of rape victims. In *The City of God* Augustine condemns Lucretia for choosing suicide after she has been raped by Tarquín. He argues that, though she chose suicide to prove that she had not consented to Tarquin's lust, Christian victims of rape need not die, for they "have within themselves the glory of chastity, the witness of their conscience. They have it also in the presence of their God and need nothing more."<sup>8</sup> But the hagiographers must demonstrate the chastity of their subjects not for the witness of conscience, not before God, but in narratives that will persuade male readers. The survival of the saint would not give her legend an adequate principle of closure, for "the witness of conscience" remains radically inconclusive when the conscience is a woman's and the narrative is a man's. The chastity of the living Prostitute Priestess raises a legal debate; that of the dead saint resolves a narrative dilemma.

When the Prostitute Priestess's aggressive self-defense has been transformed into the Christian virtue of passive endurance, the narrative need no longer ask whether killing one's would-be rapist is justifiable. The Christian martyrs lack the martial skills that made the homicide possible. They lack these skills, at any rate, in the medieval saints' lives. But there is at least a partial exception among the earliest legends. Thecla, whose history appears in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, is the prototype of the androgynous saint who exchanges a woman's status for spirituality.

To follow Paul, Thecla cut her hair. She abandoned her family and her fiancé. In the course of her wanderings, she was imprisoned and tortured. She was condemned to be burned in the theatre at Iconium and threatened with wild beasts in the arena at Antioch. When an official of Antioch attempted to embrace Thecla in the marketplace, she "ripped his cloak, took off the crown from his head, and made him a laughingstock." Unlike other virgin martyrs, Thecla went on from Antioch to a full career of preaching in Seleucia, at last ending her life in "a noble sleep."<sup>9</sup>

The unorthodox legend of Thecla, John Anson notes, "possesses at least the verisimilitude of what might be described as a historical fiction," while the legends that emerged from a later monastic culture take place in "a world of pure erotic romance."<sup>10</sup> Unlike the "erotic romance" of orthodox hagiography, the apocryphal history of Thecla (for which its author, a presbyter of the second century, was expelled from the church) remains on the margins of Christian narrative. Like the Prostitute Priestess, a saint who inhabits those margins need not die to defend herself against rape. Thecla's legend incorporates the subversive survival of the Prostitute Priestess into its fictive premises. Like later hagiographies, however, its textual strategies occlude the rhetorical agon of the Senecan advocates and prosecutors. To recover the open interrogation of that agon, the story of the saint in the brothel must be enacted rather than narrated.

## "MARINA THUS THE BROTHEL 'SCAPES"

Death concludes the history of the virgin martyr. In the romance sources and analogues of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, from *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* to the *Gesta Romanorum*, Gower's fourteenth-century *Confessio Amantis*, and Twine's *The Patterne of painefull Adventures*, marriage provides closure for the story of the eloquent virgin imprisoned in the brothel. In all these romances a virgin princess is kidnapped by pirates and sold to a pimp who places her in a brothel. Like the Prostitute Priestess, she persuades the clients to give her alms. The narrators, like the advocates of the Prostitute Priestess, praise her eloquence as miraculous. Her oratory not only preserves her virginity; it reunites her with her royal father and gains her a husband as well.

These narrative romances, like the saints' lives, take up only one side of the argument the declamation raises, recounting the negotiations between the prisoner and her clients rather than disputing their significance. As a virgin in a brothel, the heroine is a woman displaced downward. The royal marriage of the princess, like the martyrdom of the saint, restores order by ceremonially reintegrating her into her proper social status: marriage is the structural equivalent of the martyrs' sanctification.<sup>11</sup>

The tradition of the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, however, takes the brothel scenes from juridical contexts of violence and death to economic contexts of money and marriage. The princess Tharsia, like the Prostitute Priestess and the saints, is forcibly abducted and held in a brothel against her will, but the violence that underwrites the exchange of women in the declamation and the saints' legends is partly obscured by an emphasis on commercial exchange. Physical force merges with symbolic violence; sexual domination becomes a strategy for economic exploitation.<sup>12</sup>

Like the romances and saints' lives, *Pericles* presents only one side of the declaimers' argument, theatrically representing a valiant virgin whose eloquence and courage are rightly rewarded. Following the romance tradition, the opening lines of *Pericles's* brothel scenes emphasize not the violation but the commodification of the female body:

*Pand.* We lost too much money this mart by being too wenchless.

*Bawd.* We were never so much out of creatures.

We have but poor three, and they can do no more than they can do; and they with continual action are even as good as rotten.

(4.2.4-9)<sup>13</sup>

A few lines later, the Pander and the Bawd specify the means by which Marina too will be commodified. Her body will be verbally anatomized for a pornographic advertisement:

*Bawd.* Boul, take you the marks of her, the color of her hair, complexion, height, her age, with warrant of her virginity, and cry, "He that will give most shall have her first." Such a maidenhead were no cheap thing, if men were as they have been.

(11. 57-61)

Further violence lies in the subtext of this threatened fragmentation. The "continual action" in which the three whores engage is like military action; in the brothels of Mytilene, sexuality has become a war of attrition, for action has made the prostitutes "rotten":

*Bawd.* The stuff we have, a strong wind will blow it to pieces, they are so pitifully sodden.

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*Pand.* Thou sayest true, there's two unwholesome, a' conscience. The poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the little baggage.

*Boult.* Ay, she quickly poop'd him, she made him roast-meat for worms.

(11. 18-25)

The bawds' metaphoric configuration of military action and venereal disease resonates with the historical conditions of the sixteenth-century syphilis epidemic. Syphilis, a disease of early modern naval exploration and military conquest, reanimated the ancient fear of physical pollution that underlies the Roman idea of *stuprum*. The fact of syphilis transferred the corporeal pollution of illicit sexuality from the realm of ritual dread into the world of early modern medical discourse. In times of plague, *stuprum* regains its primitive material foundation; contagion supersedes Augustinian shamefastness.

Fear of contagion could be exploited ideologically to renew traditional social hierarchies. Syphilis, explains the London physician William Clowes, arose from "the licentious and beastly disorder of a great number of rogues and vagabonds, the filthy life of many lewd and idle persons, men and women." Although, as Clowes admits, "some other of better disposition are many times infected," the syphilitic became an underworld figure, for the primary carriers of the disease, prostitutes and discharged soldiers, were socially vulnerable and readily marginalized.<sup>14</sup>

Since venereal infection and social marginalization are reciprocal, the bawds' threat suggests a terrorist tactic of germ warfare: to threaten a princess with the occupational hazards of prostitution is to exploit the hierarchy of gender in rebelling against the hierarchy of class. Prostitution will destroy the dynastic value of the fetishized hymen. Then, in the diseased flesh of the syphilitic whore, the fragments of the pornographic image will be grotesquely reunited, as Marina becomes yet another "little baggage."

Like the Prostitute Priestess, Marina converts her clients through the power of eloquence: "Come," says one who has heard her sermon in the stews, "I am for no more bawdy houses. Shall's go hear the vestals sing?" (4.5.6-7). The gentlemen of Mytilene move between the brothel and the temple. These *loci*, which homologously represent the bodies of the prostitute and the priestess, are landmarks in the symbolic geography of what Peter Stallybrass calls "patriarchal territories."<sup>15</sup> Marina's eloquence, like that of the Prostitute Priestess, reconfigures those territories, exposing the motives of those who draw the boundaries. When Lysimachus, the governor of Mytilene, arrives at the brothel, Marina confronts local authority:

*Mar.* Do you know this house to be a place of such resort, and will come into't? I hear say you're of honorable parts, and are the governor of this place. *Lys.* . . . O, you have heard something of my power, and so stand aloof for more serious wooing. But I protest to thee, pretty one, my authority shall not see thee, or else look friendly upon thee. . . .

(4.6.79-81, 86-90)<sup>16</sup>

Despite Marina's similarities with the Prostitute Priestess, the narrative structure *Pericles* inherited from romance does foreclose dramatic possibilities to which the rhetorical *narratio* remains open. Marina and her predecessor Tharsia are above all marriageable; the homicidal martial art of the Prostitute Priestess does not reemerge to diminish that quality. Verbal suggestions of the character's androgynous power, however, do remain. Although Marina never uses physical force to repel an attacker, the "sweet harmony" of her eloquence "make[s] a batt'ry through [Pericles'] deafen'd parts" (5.1.47), and he tells her "thou art a man, and I / Have suffered like a girl" (11. 136-37). For Bawd and Pander, Marina's rhetorical victory over her wouldbe clients is "virginal fencing" (4.4.57). When they send their servant Boult to rape her and break her to the trade, she responds with ferocity:



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Thou hold'st a place for which the pained'st fiend  
Of hell would not in reputation change.  
Thou art the damned door-keeper to every  
Custrel that comes inquiring for his Tib.  
To the choleric fisting of every rogue  
Thy ear is liable; thy food is such  
As hath been belch'd on by infected lungs.

(4.6.163-69)

Marina's pugnacious oration is a vestige of the martial skill of the Prostitute Priestess, but it is not in itself sufficient to convert Boult. For those employed in the whorehouses of Mytilene, economic need is impervious to the persuasive powers of a moralizing rhetoric:

What would you have me do? Go to the wars, would you? Where a man may serve seven years for the loss of a leg, and have not money enough in the end to buy him a wooden one?

(11. 170-73)

Marina's eloquent response is of limited practical value:

Do any thing but this thou doest. Empty  
Old receptacles, or common shores, of filth,  
Serve by indenture to the common hangman:  
Any of these ways are yet better than this. . .

(11. 174-77)

At last, confined rhetorically to the economic marketplace, she strikes a bargain with him:

If that thy master would gain by me,  
Proclaim that I can sing, weave, sew, and dance,  
With other virtues, which I'll keep from boast,  
And will undertake all these to teach.  
I doubt not but this populous city will  
Yield many scholars.

(11. 182-87)

The art of eloquence, extended into music, weaving, and riddle lore, purchases Marina's freedom from the brothel. Unlike the Prostitute Priestess and the saints, she need neither kill nor die to avoid prostitution; eloquence preserves her chastity without bloodshed. Her most characteristic combat occurs in a feminized form more appropriate for preparing a trousseau than repelling a rapist. In embroidering, Shakespeare's Gower tells us, Marina "would with sharp needle wound / The cambric, which she made more sound / By hurting it" (4.Chorus.23).

The practice of embroidery requires costly leisure, and Marina's proficiency testifies to her meticulous education. Unlike the Prostitute Priestess's martial skill, it is a traditionally feminine accomplishment. It is, the 1596 preface to *A Booke of Curious and Strange Inventions* argues, suitable for women who are either "of a high degree" or who hope to elevate themselves socially: "For many maidens but of base degree . . . / With noble ladies oft companions be / Sometimes they teach the daughter of a king."<sup>17</sup> This advice for displaying or

acquiring status is doubly significant for a princess imprisoned in the material circumstances of a prostitute. Marina's ability to rise above these circumstances comes from joining entrepreneurial ability to the skills her noble birth and training have given her. Although a princess, like a prostitute, may be a commodity, the princess's price includes the charges of her birth and breeding, a higher rate than pimps and bawds can pay.

Since Marina's escape does not depend on martial prowess, the textual echoes of androgyny need not be theatrically reinforced by verbal or visual cues that suggest that Marina could defend herself physically against Boult's attempted rape. She does not challenge the male monopoly on violence as the Prostitute Priestess does. Marina's eventual triumph allows her to return to her rightful place in a patriarchal world where fathers and husbands are a woman's best protection against pirates and pimps.

The metaphoric androgyny of Marina's "virginal fencing" does resonate with the theatrical convention of the boy actor, but this resonance does not necessarily question representational strategies for naturalizing beliefs about women's vulnerability. In the dramatic fiction Marina's eloquence conquers the brothel's customers, but in the theatrical *mise-en-scène* physical contrasts between the adult who plays Boult and the feminized boy who plays Marina may reinforce patriarchal hierarchies predicated on violence. As the rhetorical convention of speaking *ethicos* creates the Prostitute Priestess from the declaimers' discourse, the theatrical convention of the boy actor encodes Shakespeare's Marina as a vulnerable and hence feminine presence. On the Shakespearean stage the figure of Marina fuses the rhetorical fiction of the androgynous Prostitute Priestess with the historical reality of the sexually ambiguous boy actor; his problematic status as theatricalized demimondaine underscores the economic value of Marina's sexual vulnerability.<sup>18</sup>

There was historically no female presence to challenge androcentrism in the schools of declamation. Nor did women, though present as spectators in the playhouse, appear on the Shakespearean stage.<sup>19</sup> Yet in both venues the dynamics of performance may have operated in some measure to subvert the androcentrism inscribed in the representational strategies of the narrative tradition. Despite Gower's active attempts to "stand i' th' gaps" of the story (4.4.8), the theatrical structure of *Pericles* remains open. Gower cannot defeat theatrical indeterminacy through his narrative strategies because it is not Gower, the representative of ancient authority, but the actor playing Gower who will "stand i' th' gaps," and no actor can control the performance when he is not onstage.

When the theatrical dynamics of the performance text underscore conflicts and contradictions in the fictive premises of the play text, they render Gower's commentary ineffective. Like the declaimers whose *argumenta in utramque partem* reveal gaps in statutory law, the characters of the brothel scenes offer antithetical interpretations of the events in the brothel. The bawds and Marina each articulate one premise in the patriarchal ideology of rape; each is an inadequate response to the dramatic situation. Taken together, however, they expose the conflicts that singly they would occlude.

The bawds, like the accusers of the Prostitute Priestess, trivialize rape and prostitution. Both rape and prostitution, they assume, occur only with the implied consent of lascivious and greedy women. The Shakespearean theatricalization of this attitude produces a comic *mise-en-scène* for the brothel at Mytilene. But when Marina is introduced into this comic setting, her repugnance belies the bawds' assumptions, exposing their economic motives. Marina's reaction, however, ironically heightens the bawds' theatrical vitality, thus keeping their perspective before the audience. Though Marina may cherish her maidenhead as a pearl beyond price, the bawds remain onstage to appraise its market value. The theatrically grotesque effect of this dual perspective problematizes audience response: while the bawds' opportunism mocks the horror with which patriarchy acknowledges the violation of aristocratic virginity, Marina's rage embarrasses the prurient laughter that greets the sexual exploitation of the unprotected. The case, argued *in utramque partem*, is altered.

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Yet *Pericles* does not explicitly reopen the case of the Prostitute Priestess. Pericles, restored to political and domestic authority as king and father, ratifies the marriage of Marina and Lysimachus: "This prince, the fair betrothed of your daughter," he announces to Thaisa, "Shall marry her at Pentapolis" (5.3.71-72). But eloquent Marina, like Isabella, the eloquent virgin of *Measure for Measure*, responds with silence to the announcement of her marriage. Because her silence, like Isabella's, must be negotiated theatrically, it resonates more deeply with the theatrical ellipses of the Senecan declamation than with the narrative closure of the romance.<sup>20</sup>

The Senecan rhetoric of rape, originating in the semi-improvisational contexts of the Roman schools of declamation, returns via the scripted silences and antagonistic perspectives of the Shakespearean play text to trouble the narrative closure that hagiography and romance had imposed on the motif of the Prostitute Priestess. The destiny of the Prostitute Priestess must be renegotiated with each performance of the declamation, and as it is renegotiated, debate over the source, extent, and legitimacy of female resistance to male violence is renewed. In the rhetorical play of advocates and prosecutors, no formal resolution can achieve more than a temporary victory of one contestant over another in the continual agonies that establish patriarchal hierarchy; no judicial decision can authoritatively categorize the Prostitute Priestess as virgin or whore.

The narrative tradition reinscribes the transgressive Prostitute Priestess into a fixed status within patriarchal structures. This reinscription, as the legend of Thecla reveals, is vulnerable to slight variations of plot and characterization, yet the textual strategies of legend and romance work to efface that vulnerability. Whether the story of the eloquent virgin ends with the death of a saint or the marriage of a princess, narrative resolution evades the dilemma of the declamation, insisting that patriarchal categories adequately represent women's sexuality. When the hagiographers and the writers of romance grant their authority to a woman's tale of abduction and attempted rape, the closure of their narratives also closes the case of the Prostitute Priestess. The declaimers' judicial inquiry into the veracity of the victim is replaced with an authoritative representation of her imprisonment, painted in the rhetorical *colores* of her advocates.

From this narrative tradition, *Pericles* derives a dramatic plot that permits Marina to escape the brothel but not to evade the marriage that reinserts her into the patriarchal structures of Mytilene. In the transformation of that narrative for theatrical representation, however, its ideological closure is disturbed—a disturbance to which Gower's ineffectively authorial presence testifies. Gower's speech, like Marina's silence, and like the antagonistic perspectives of the brothel scenes, must be performed, and the contingencies of performance, mediating between the resolution of the play text and the spectator's response, may intervene to expose the improvisational (and hence provisional) quality of that resolution. The politics of actors' or directors' choices for line readings and stage images, the extra dramatic relation that a strong performer may establish with the audience, even the danger of a missed cue or a bumbled exit may, in various ways, problematize dramatic closure, evoking instead the open-ended *controversia*. The Prostitute Priestess is not only Marina's literary precursor, passing through classical and medieval discourses of gender and violence en route to the Shakespearean playtext. She is the survivor of a dramatic agon through which the rhetoric of rape may still be contested.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-1975), Vol. 6, 546-48. For discussions of declamation as a literary source for Renaissance drama, see Eugene M.

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Waith, "John Fletcher and the Art of Declamation," *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 226-34; "*Controversia* in the English Drama: Medwall and Massinger," *PMLA*, 68 (1953), 286-303; *The Pattern of Tragicomedie in Beaumont and Fletcher*, *Yale Studies in English*, no. 120 (1952), 86-98; and Joel B. Atman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978). Suzanne Gossett challenges Waith's view that the influence of declamation results only in rhetorical virtuosity, arguing that Beaumont and Fletcher create a strong emotional effect by manipulating the standard rape plot of earlier drama. See "'Best Men are Molded out of Faults': Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama," *English Literary Renaissance*, 14 (1984), 305-27.

<sup>2</sup> *Controversiae*, 1.2. Quotations from Seneca are from the Loeb edition, trans. Michael Winterbottom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974). Further references to this edition will appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the social and literary history of Roman declamation, see S. F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Liverpool: Univ. Press of Liverpool, 1949); Harry Caplan, "The Decay of Eloquence at Rome in the First Century" in *Of Eloquence: Studies in Ancient and Mediaeval Rhetoric*, Anne King and Helen North, eds. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 160-95; and Wesley Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and Its Continuity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 306-27.

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes*, 5.12.17. Quotations from Quintilian are from the Loeb edition, trans. H. E. Butler (London: Heinemann, 1921), p. 307.

<sup>5</sup> *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> For an economical and provocative discussion of "the paradoxes that govern the laws of rape" when based on rules of morality, see Frances Ferguson, "Rape and the Rise of the Novel" in *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy*, R. Howard Bloch and Frances Ferguson, eds. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), pp. 88-113.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *Here begynneth the legende named in latyn legenda aurea that is to say in englyshe the golden legende . . .* (Westminster: Caxton, 1483), fols. lxxvii<sup>r</sup>-lxxviii<sup>r</sup>. See also the lives of Theodore, Eugenne, and Pelagien in *The Golden Legende*. For discussions of the virgin martyr, see John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of A Motif," *Viator*, 5 (1974), 1-32; and Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginitie: *Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation*" in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Mary Beth Rose, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 29-72. For discussions of the complicated history linking "valor and virginity," see Nancy Huston, "The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes" in *The Female Body in Western Culture: contemporary perspectives*, Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 119-36; Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York: Harrington Park, 1985); Marina Warner, "Virgins and Martyrs" in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976), pp. 68-78; and Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), pp. 169-95.

<sup>8</sup> *The City of God*, 1.19. Quotations from Augustine are from the Loeb edition, trans. George E. McCracken (London: Heinemann, 1957), p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> "The Acts of Paul and Thecla," trans. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, in *The Other Bible*, ed. Willis Barnstone (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 447-53, esp. pp. 451, 453.

<sup>10</sup> "The Female Transvestite," p. 11 (cited in n. 7, above).

<sup>11</sup> The deployment of marriage and death as homologous narrative resolutions extends from pre-classical Greece to modern novels. See Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 84-92; Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 130-52; and Margaret Higonnet, "Speaking Silences: Women's Suicide" in *The Female Body*, pp. 68-83 (cited in n. 7, above).

<sup>12</sup> In one romance, however, Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaca*, the imprisoned heroine, Antheia, does kill a guard who tries to rape her. See Arthur Heiserman, *The Novel before the Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 51-52; and Thomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), pp. 31-32. For a discussion of *Pericles's* assimilation of the economic subtexts of romance from a different perspective, see Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 137-42; and for a suggestive study of "the peculiar sensibility that made [Greek romance] available to Shakespeare," see Terry Comito, "Exile and Return in the Greek Romances," *Arion*, 2 (1975), 58-80, esp. p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Quotations from *Pericles* are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evans, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974); to avoid confusion with my own interpolations, Evans's brackets have been silently deleted.

<sup>14</sup> *A Short and Profitable Treatise Touching the Cure of the Disease Called (Morbus Gallicus) by Uncions* (1579; rpt. New York: Scholars' Facsimile, 1945), p. 149. Studies of the sixteenth-century syphilis epidemic include Charles Dennie, *A History of Syphilis* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1962); R. S. Morton, *Venereal Diseases* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966); and William Pusey, *The History and Epidemiology of Syphilis* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1933). In *Harlots, Whores, & Hookers: A History of Prostitution* (New York: Taplinger, 1979) Hilary Evans notes the effect of the epidemic on prostitution: "From this time on, the problem of the prostitute could never be dissociated from that of disease; henceforward she represented a sanitary as well as a moral problem" (p. 64). See also E. J. Burford, *Bawds and Lodgings: A History of the London Bankside Brothels c. 100-1675* (London: Peter Owen, 1976), pp. 113-15 and passim; and Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England," *Signs*, 14 (1989), 399-433. Andrew Welsh also notes *Pericles's* emphasis on venereal disease in "Heritage in *Pericles*" in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: Essays in Honor of Charles Crow*, Richard C. Tobias and Paul G. Zolbrod, eds. (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 89-113, esp. pp. 103-5.

<sup>15</sup> "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed" in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, eds. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 123-42.

<sup>16</sup> On the related motif of the judge and the nun, see Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 298-321.

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Battista Ciotti, *The First Part of Needleworks: Or, A Booke of Curious and Strange Inventions* (London, 1596). I quote this English translation of Ciotti from a microfilm copy at the Huntington Library. On the "elevated class associations" and the feminizing functions of embroidery as a component of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women's educations, see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), pp. 60-81. Jane Schneider describes some of the economic foundations and symbolic associations of women's needlework in "Trousseau as Treasure: Some Contradictions of Late Nineteenth-Century Change in Sicily" in *The Marriage Bargain: Women and Dowries in European History*, Marion A. Kaplan, ed. (New York: Haworth Press, 1985), pp. 81-119. Weaving and spinning are, Schneider notes, associated with dowries throughout European tradition. Penelope and St. Agatha, "the Christianized Penelope," could postpone marriage by claiming that the work of their looms was incomplete.

<sup>18</sup> On the status of apprentices at the public theatres, see Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 113-46. For the legal records concerning boys' impressment and apprenticeship at the private playhouses, see Harold Hillebrand, *The Child Actors* (1926; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 160-63 and 197-99. In *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* ([London: Gay Men's Press, 1982], pp. 54-56) Alan Bray describes homosexual prostitution in the London theatrical milieu; Stephen Orgel pursues the implications of Bray's work in "Nobody's Perfect: Or Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?" *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88 (1989), 7-29.

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of female spectators in the Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses, see Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama," *English Literary History*, 54 (1987), 561-83; and Jean E. Howard, "Scripts and/versus Playhouses: Ideological Production and the Renaissance Public Stage," *Renaissance Drama*, 20 (1989), 31-49.

<sup>20</sup> I do not know of a production of *Pericles* that has problematized Marina's silence as recent productions of *Measure for Measure* have problematized Isabella's. On the ideology of Isabella's performance choices, see Paola Dionisotti's and Juliet Stevenson's remarks on the 1978 and 1983 Royal Shakespeare Company productions in *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today*, Carol Rutter, ed. (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp. 26-52. On the ways performance texts of other plays have used scripted silences, see Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985).

### **Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast (essay date 1996)**

SOURCE: "Engendering *Pericles*," in *Literature and Psychology*, Vol. XXXXII, No. 4, 1996, pp. 53-75.

[In the essay below, Prendergast traces the influence of the Oedipus story in *Pericles*, revealing elements of the play which Shakespeare is unable to resolve.]

Because it derives from a "bad" quarto and because it may not be solely by Shakespeare, the ambiguous, even illegitimate status of *Pericles* has long been the most discussed aspect of the play.<sup>1</sup> Given this ongoing preoccupation with the play's illegitimacy, it is curious how few scholars have noted the extent to which *Pericles* itself is about legitimate and illegitimate textuality. From the beginning of the play, Shakespeare raises the question of whether he can, in fact, be considered the sole author of the play. Not only does he introduce us to Gower as the authoritative progenitor of *Pericles*, but he then has Gower refer to a long tradition of telling the *Pericles* story, a tradition that appears to stretch back to the earliest days of storytelling itself.<sup>2</sup> If, by questioning his sole authority over his text, Shakespeare echoes critical concerns about the legitimate authorship of *Pericles*, this interrogation of exclusive authorship, in the play, is presented as an ideal to strive for, not as an unfortunate textual problem; in fact, for Shakespeare, the acknowledgement of one's literary predecessors promises a kind of immortality: just as Gower is brought back to life every time a younger author (like Shakespeare) retells the story of *Pericles*, so, it appears, Shakespeare will be brought back to life each time a later author, or audience, takes up this story.

Yet despite the premise that an author gains literary immortality when he dispossesses himself of his text, the play's initial conflict between the ideal of accepting one's authorial lineage and the temptation to deny one's literary predecessors spills over into the body of the text; here it is recast as a conflict between possessive, infertile endogamy and the ideal of exogamy—in which the father dispossesses himself of his progeny in order to ensure the immortality of his lineage. But the parallels between literary and familial lineage are more than mere analogies in the play; in fact, one is often confused with the other. Just as Gower, at times, appears as a sort of father figure to Shakespeare, so the father figures in this play often describe their progeny as texts. I would argue that Shakespeare sets forth this complex interaction between familial and textual lineages in

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order to accentuate an ideal of "dispossession"—an ideal set forth in the paradox that one can only gain literary and familial immortality by denying one's own text and progeny.

In *Pericles*, I will argue, this ideal of dispossession has strong Oedipal resonances; as Shoshana Felman tells us, the Oedipus story appears, at first, to be the myth of a possession (of a kingdom, of a woman, of the solution to a riddle, of one's story). But, as it turns out, "Oedipus is not the myth of the possession of a story, but the myth, precisely, of the dispossession by the story—the dispossession of the possessor of the story (1046)."<sup>3</sup> Like the Oedipus plays, *Pericles* is about a young man who attempts to gain possession of a kingdom by claiming the king's daughter—a woman whose identity is closely wrapped up in a riddle. More significantly, *Pericles* is also about the tension between possession and dispossession of woman or text. Both frame and central drama set forth man's desire to possess an object—whether it be one's story or one's child; both frame and tale, however, enact the paradox that it is only by dispossessing oneself of story and child that one can gain immortality. Thus, if fathers, in this play, must let go of their children to the suitors who claim them, so, Shakespeare suggests, established authors must let go of their texts to younger writers who would inherit them. This ideal of textual and filial dispossession, epitomized by Gower and Pericles, is opposed in the play by the possessive father, Antiochus, whose desire to hold on to his daughter (a daughter whom he presents as a kind of text) threatens not only the young men who would become his sons-in-law, but the very existence of Antiochus's lineage itself.<sup>4</sup>

But if the play and its framing drama are about the repressive / redemptive relations between fathers and sons, the play is also about relations between fathers and daughters—between Antiochus and his daughter, between Pericles and Marina, and between Cleon and his daughter. Imitating the chronology of the play, I will discuss, first, how Shakespeare sets forth his ideal of dispossession (and the temptation of possessiveness) by contrasting Gower with Antiochus, then examine Pericles's status as would-be father and artist before exploring why Shakespeare finally changes focus from his hero Pericles to his heroine Marina. This change, I believe, affirms his ideal of dispossession (one that, I will argue later, Shakespeare himself was only partially able to realize), as I suggest that, for Shakespeare, the ultimate act of dispossession is the movement from a male to a female lineage.<sup>5</sup>

Shakespeare's presentation of Gower as a genial and unthreatening literary progenitor would at first seem to support Harold Bloom's thesis that Shakespeare never experienced the sort of Oedipal anxieties that strong poets after Milton have had to face: according to Bloom, Shakespeare simply did not have a predecessor commanding enough to touch off such primal fears (11). Yet the structural pattern of *Pericles*—its rhythmic development from father to father—suggests that the play is in fact about Oedipal fears and fantasies. Specifically, it is about Shakespeare's triumph over paternity by his deformation of the Freudian Oedipal scene; for if the classic Oedipal moment develops out of the father's competition with his son over the possession of the mother, *Pericles* is, instead, about a father / son conflict over possession of the daughter. The play, then, authorizes the son's Oedipal desires by dramatizing the son's right to possess the woman that he would claim from the father, while displaying the father's continued possession of the daughter as an unnatural act. If, then, the Freudian Oedipal scene is resolved when the son surrenders his claim to his mother, here it can only be resolved when the father dispossesses himself of his daughter, yielding her to the younger generation that claims her.<sup>6</sup> That Shakespeare would ally himself with the son's Oedipal fantasy is not, perhaps, surprising; Shakespeare was, after all, a literary "son," who inherited most of his plots—including the story of Apollonius of Tyre (*Pericles*)—from previous authors. Shakespeare's "filial" status as a writer would, it appears, encourage him to view the Apollonius story as belonging not to his literary father, Gower, but rather to younger authors, like himself, who would claim the text as their own.<sup>7</sup>

That Shakespeare entered into some sort of competitive relationship with his *auctor* Gower raises the question of how important it would be for a Renaissance writer to claim a text as his own—how important, in other words, the modern concept of originality would be for someone like Shakespeare. Clearly an author who bases his plays on well-known, even well-worn, tales would not be concerned with claiming that his plots

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were solely of his own invention; but it is true that, during the sixteenth century, many authors came to believe that a significant text should, to some extent, depart from the ideas and structures of its predecessors. This increasing concern with originality has been charted by David Quint, who traces how authors like Ariosto, Ronsard, and Rabelais exploit the notion of a literary vernacular to claim that they are originating a vital literary tradition in their own language.<sup>8</sup>

But if this gradual emphasis on asserting one's independence from one's *auctor* allowed Renaissance writers greater freedom to create fictional spaces that they could claim as their own, it also gave birth to some anxiety: for if a text's significance inheres in its author's ability to outdo previous authors, then this author, in turn, makes himself vulnerable to being effaced by younger authors who invent new versions of his text.<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare, I believe, attempts to resolve this dilemma by presenting his ideal of dispossession: each older author willingly gives up his text to the next generation of writers, a sacrifice for which he is rewarded when he is acknowledged as an enabling source; his immortality is, then, ensured by each generation of writers that is inspired by the text.<sup>10</sup> The ideal of dispossession is a strategy that Shakespeare employs when he acknowledges his story's origins in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, without diminishing his own, original, perspective on this "mouldy tale."<sup>11</sup>

It is, above all, Shakespeare's portrayal of Gower that allows him to set forth this ideal of dispossession, for Gower's first action in the play is to relinquish his claim to the Apollonius story: he opens the play by telling us that the story is not, originally, his—that it is part of an older tradition (I.Cho.1); and he ends his prologue by surrendering his text to its readers (I.Cho.41-2).<sup>12</sup> Between these two remarks, he openly describes himself as a sacrificial figure who willingly gives up his text to its audience: "I life would wish, and that I might/Waste it for you like taper-light" (I.Cho.15-16). By freely dispossessing himself of his text, Gower follows the logic of the Oedipal paradigm as it is expressed in *Pericles*: the text, though his progeny, belongs to a younger generation, not to the father who created it. This perpetual transmission of the Apollonius story from literary father to son represents a notion of textuality as fluid and open-ended—constantly revised and revived by each new generation that receives it.<sup>13</sup>

If Gower is presented to us as the ideal, self-sacrificing father, he is immediately followed by Antiochus, who is both an oppressive father and a repressive artist. Rather than freely dispossess himself of his progeny, he transforms her into a sort of art object that he can claim as his absolute possession. Antiochus's daughter appears as an instrument (a "fair viol") that is "played upon" by her father (I.i.82) and as the "book of praises" (I.i.16) authored by her father and presented to be viewed—but not touched—by the suitors for her hand. Antiochus, then, is an artist/father who retains absolute possession of that which he creates: he is, in fact, a nightmare version of the petrarchan lover—an artist who attempts to possess his beloved by transforming her from an alien, enigmatic woman into an idolatrous fetishized text, a text to which only he has the key.<sup>14</sup>

What distinguishes Antiochus from Gower, above all, is Antiochus's inability to recognize "otherness"—the existence of any person or experience that is not the mirror image of the self and that, therefore, cannot be absolutely controlled or possessed by the self.<sup>15</sup> It is this instinct to repress otherness—whether otherness is experienced as one's uncontrollable unconscious, the annihilating experience of death, the threat of sexuality (which Lacan and Freud compare to death), or the alien presence of woman—that leads Antiochus to transform his daughter from complex subject into a reassuring, narcissistic image of himself; he does so by imposing an incestuous relationship upon her.<sup>16</sup>

Antiochus's refusal to recognize his daughter as a subject in her own right is echoed in the riddle that he creates to prevent the suitors from gaining access to her:

Which to prevent he made a law,  
To keep her *still*, and men in awe;  
That whoso ask'd her for his wife,



His riddle told not, lost his life.

(my italics; L Cho. 35-9)

In Antiochus's shaping hands the riddle appears not as an enigma, but rather as an extension of the father's absolute law. The emphasis on "law" reminds us that Antiochus, as father and king, embodies patriarchal culture at its most pervasive and repressive. For Antiochus, law is censorship—a law the tyrant invokes to silence both his daughter and the suitors for her hand.<sup>17</sup> The repressive connotations of this law are expressed in the word "still": the term not only reminds us of Antiochus's repressive hold over his daughter, but it also signifies his stilling of his daughter's voice in choosing a future husband. And by refusing to let go of his daughter, Antiochus keeps her static ("still"), as his "glorious casket" (I.i.78)—the unnamed object of her father's passion. Where Shakespeare's puns normally open up into a proliferation of possible meanings, these *double entendres* compel the reader to return to the obsessive and narrow significance which Antiochus would impose on his daughter.

As the play moves from Gower to Antiochus, then, it regresses from a vision of literary and sanguineous paternity as fluid and open-ended to a concept of text and progeny as static, idolatrous objects to be possessed and mastered by the father.<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare's portrayal of Antiochus's victims dramatizes this latter vision, for they appear to us as "heads displayed at the entrance" (I.s.d.) of Antiochus's palace—heads which are left to "tell thee, with speechless tongue and semblance pale, / That . . . / Here they stand martyrs slain in Cupid's wars" (I.i.35-7).<sup>19</sup> Deprived of speech, the suitors, like Antiochus's daughter, have been transformed from complex subjects in their own rights into silent emblems of Antiochus's castrating power.<sup>20</sup>

The contrast between the opposing notions of authorship embodied in Gower and Antiochus inheres, then, in the paradox of otherness. Antiochus hopes to retain control over his life by repressing otherness—by transforming subjective woman, enigmatic text, and threatening sexuality into a static projection of the self; ironically, this instinct for self-possession leads to the loss of self—to the death of his lineage. In contrast, Gower is an author who faces death (dispossession of his text) by recognizing the unstable, dynamic, and elusive polyphony of his text; this process actually ensures his immortality: he is brought back to life each time he allows the Apollonius/Pericles story to be rewrought by a new author. The play, after all, begins with the resurrection of Gower: "To sing a song that old was sung, / From ashes ancient Gower is come" (I.Cho.1-2). Shakespeare's Gower, then, presents an alternative to Antiochus, who stands for the Lacanian notion that the Father is absolute truth. This rigid notion of fatherhood (embodied in Antiochus) may be displaced by Gower, who represents a more liquid, communal and risky notion of truth.

If the play opens with a strong focus on father figures, it soon yields place to Pericles, who must, in reading the riddle, choose between two notions of paternity: if he mis-reads the riddle, he identifies himself with Antiochus, and, thus, allows himself to be turned into another petrified image of Antiochus's power; but if he reads past the notion of riddle-as-law and into the deeper layers of the text, he moves away from the temptation of fixation that is epitomized by Antiochus and into a more fluid and dynamic notion of artistry represented by Gower and by the generous father figures that follow him—Pericles's father and Simonides. By turning from the tyrannical Antiochus and towards the generous Simonides (the image of Pericles's true father), Pericles acts out the sort of process which Shakespeare himself may have undergone. In adapting Gower's popular version of the Apollonius story, Shakespeare does not envision Gower as an Antiochus-like father figure whose tyrannical hold on his story blocks the creativity of younger authors; rather, he envisions Gower as an *auctor* who freely dispossesses himself of the Apollonius story to younger authors who would rename and revise this traditional tale (much as Simonides generously gives his daughter up to Pericles).

The apparent analogy between Shakespeare's position as younger author and Pericles's position as a young suitor is strengthened by the constant references to Antiochus as both tyrannical father and a blocking author/artist whose influence Pericles must learn to reject. This eventual rejection results from Pericles's

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reading of both Antiochus's riddle and the *imago* of the daughter. Satisfied, at first, with the external appearance of the daughter, Pericles does not seek to inquire beyond the superficial image that Antiochus presents to him: he first reads her as "the book of praises, where is read / Nothing but curious pleasures" (I.i.16-17);<sup>21</sup> but when Pericles turns from Antiochus's daughter-as-text to the text of the riddle itself (with which Antiochus's daughter is identified), he learns to look beyond the daughter's enticing facade: "Fair glass of light, I lov'd you, and could still, / Were not this glorious casket stor'd with ill" (I.i.77-8). The images of transparency that dominate this couplet reveal what Pericles has learned as he looks beyond the exterior of the "fair" princess: the princess is not, as she appears to be, the subjective Other that Pericles must risk encountering; rather, she is an idolatrous image wrought by her father—a beautiful vessel that encloses her father's primal sin.<sup>22</sup>

What separates Pericles from the other suitors—what allows him to understand the meaning of the riddle—seems to be his gift of self-recognition; thus, looking up at the suitors' heads, he comments:

Antiochus, I thank thee, who hath taught  
My frail mortality to know itself,  
And by those fearful objects to prepare  
This body, like to them, to what I must,

For death remember'd should be like a mirror,  
Who tells us life's but breath, to trust it error.

(I.i.42-7)

Where Antiochus's repression of his daughter's subjectivity and his execution of her suitors reveals his obsession with holding on to absolute power, Pericles is, from the beginning, represented as willing to recognize man's ultimate powerlessness in the face of death. It is this characteristic ability to recognize what others repress that allows Pericles to look beyond the riddle's superficial appearance as Antiochus's absolute "law" and perceive the deeper, repressed layers of meaning hidden within it. By recognizing his mortality, then, Pericles frees himself from the paralysis of repression and fixation that characterizes Antiochus and those who fall under his influence.<sup>23</sup>

It is at this moment that *Pericles* most strongly recalls *Oedipus Rex*. Both works, as I noted earlier, involve a riddle, incest, and a contest with a father; but Shakespeare presents the Oedipal experience in such a way as to distance his work from the tragic implications of *Oedipus Rex*. For where Oedipus solves the riddle of man's birth and mortality only to fall blindly into incest, Pericles discerns incest itself in the relationship between Antiochus and his daughter; thus, in solving the riddle, he is able to turn away from the temptation of incest; in the process, he avoids possessiveness—a trait that, in this play, is closely associated with incest.

The difference between these two hero-rulers is expressed, as well, in their opposing reactions to the riddle.<sup>24</sup> Where Oedipus rashly believes that, in solving the Sphinx's riddle, he has gained mastery over his life and destiny, Pericles never reveals any hubristic sense of self-mastery: in fact, he never articulates the apparent answer to the riddle.<sup>25</sup> If, then, the story of Oedipus is, as Shoshana Felman puts it, about "mis-recognition" of "one's history," the story of Pericles represents the hero's ability to avoid the staticity and idolatry that is associated with a hubristic confidence in absolute meanings, as he recognizes, instead, the enigma of his mortality (1025).<sup>26</sup>

The logic of *Pericles*, then, is paradoxical: Antiochus, who holds on to life by clinging to his daughter while demonstrating his absolute power over her suitors, soon dies a terrible death, leaving no progeny to continue his lineage; in contrast, Pericles, who keeps his mortality in mind, and who recognizes how little control he has over his fate, is immortalized as he recognizes that he is part of a past, present, and future lineage.<sup>27</sup>

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This process of recognition begins as Pericles looks past the false model of fatherhood—Antiochus—to recognize his own father, who, unlike Antiochus, freely bequeaths his heritage to his progeny (much as Gower and Shakespeare recognize the ancient lineage of the Apollonius story):<sup>28</sup>

An armour, friends! I pray you, let me see it.  
Thanks, Fortune, yet, that after all thy crosses  
Thou giv'st me somewhat to repair myself;  
And though it was mine own, part of mine heritage.  
Which my dead father did bequeath to me, With  
this strict charge, even as he left his life:  
"Keep it, my Pericles; it hath been a shield  
"Twixt me and death".

(II.i.119-26)

The pun on "repair" ("re-père") reinforces the link between the "rusty armour" (II.i.118) of Pericles's father and Pericles's recognition of his lineage (which will soon be fulfilled, as Pericles himself becomes a father). As such the armor might well recall Gower's "Apollonius of Tyre"—a rather rusty piece that Gower's literary son nonetheless recognizes as a vital source of his creativity. Significantly, it is after he takes on his father's armor that Pericles is first referred to as an artist (II.v.25-8); he becomes an artist not only by acknowledging his father, but also by taking on a wife, with whom he creates Marina.<sup>29</sup>

It is after recognizing his heritage that Pericles is freed to move from the problematic Antiochus to the more constructive father figure Simonides, whom Pericles calls "my father's picture" (II.iii.37); for Simonides (in contrast to Antiochus) is a king who allows his daughter both free speech and the freedom to choose a husband. The chiasmic relationship between Antiochus and Simonides is expressed in their speech and actions as well. Where Antiochus appears as a welcoming father-in-law, who "seem'd not to strike, but smooth" (I.ii.78) while secretly plotting to have Pericles killed, Simonides severely tests Pericles's love for Thaisa, but says, secretly, "Now, by the gods, I do approve his [Pericles's] courage" (II.v.57). Significantly, Thaisa appears as the opposite of Antiochus's daughter: not only does she speak for herself, but both women are compared in antipodal ways to caskets: where Antiochus's daughter is a "glorious casket" who is, psychically, dead, Thaisa later appears in a casket, seeming to be dead, while she is, in fact, alive.<sup>30</sup>

If, then, the incestuous kingdom of Antiochus is characterized by castration, censorship, and superficial appearance, the kingdom of Simonides inspires the fertile continuity of a lineage—a lineage that grows out of the union of Pericles's and Thaisa's families; their progeny is Marina, whose birth inverts Pericles's threatened death at the hands of Antiochus. About Marina's birth Gower states, "Hymen hath brought the bride to bed, / Where by the loss of maidenhead / A babe is molded" (III. Cho. 9-11). This bed / maidenhead rhyme inverts the rhymes of Antiochus's rather grisly couplet: "Till Pericles be dead / My heart can lend no succour to my head" (Lib. 170-71).

Yet it is also true that the specter of death hangs over Pericles's family—whether it be Antiochus's attempt to assassinate Pericles, Thaisa's "death" in childbirth, or Marina's threatened death at the hands of Dionyza's henchman. The threat of death may in part be due to contamination—specifically to Pericles's contamination by the incestuous affair between Antiochus and his daughter.<sup>31</sup> Pericles himself notes that "vice repeated is like the wand'ring wind, / Blows dust in others' eyes, to spread itself (I.i.93-5). This potential regression into narcissism and incest is, then, experienced as a kind of plague that endangers the existence of Pericles, Thaisa and Marina.<sup>32</sup>

Even more problematic is how the separate members of Pericles's family threaten each other. Marina's innocent birth threatens her mother with death, while Thaisa and Marina displace Pericles, who is absent

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through most of Acts III-IV: woman and child, it appears, simply by being Other, threaten to efface the identity and autonomy of man and parent.<sup>33</sup> Yet there is clearly a difference between the threat evoked by Thaisa and Marina and that evoked by Antiochus and Dionyza. Antiochus and Dionyza both represent parental figures who repress all symptoms of subjectivity in others; Thaisa and Marina, in contrast, represent the risk of otherness itself—the risk that each person must undertake in order for the family lineage to be maintained: the play, then, repeats its essential paradox—to cling to life and power (as do Antiochus and Dionyza) is to die; to risk death (to recognize the Other) is the only means by which one may recover one's self and lineage. This is why, if Pericles, Thaisa, and Marina are threatened with death and censorship, they are, finally, reunited. This recovery occurs, as Richard Hillman tells us, when Marina remembers her father—when father, daughter, and mother recognize at once each other and themselves (431)<sup>34</sup>

But what does it mean that the text presents woman as the fulfillment of a patriarchal lineage? It does not necessarily mean that women represent an alternative to the tyrannical power of the father, for Dionyza and Bawd are, like Antiochus, autocratic parental figures. But by representing the continuation of a lineage through the daughter, rather than the son (the image of his father), Shakespeare does suggest the importance of recognizing otherness—a recognition enabled when the father rejects the glamour of incest to affirm, instead, the daughter's rights to her subjective existence; this recognition takes place when Pericles frees Marina to marry Lysimachus, much as Simonides freed Thaisa to marry Pericles.

Dispossession in the play, then, is expressed as the movement from incest to exogamy—the movement that, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, is the founding moment of culture, when man no longer keeps his woman to himself, but rather surrenders her to other men in order to forge alliances with other tribes. Such an alliance appears to take place near the end of the play, as Lysimachus tells Pericles: "I have another suit," and Pericles answers: "You shall prevail, / Were it to woo my daughter" (V.i.259-60): the marriage between Lysimachus and Marina in fact binds the kingdoms of Tyre and Mytilene to each other. But the way in which this alliance is achieved problematizes the notion that exogamy fully promotes a recognition of otherness; for, in the process, Marina's power and presence seem to be occluded. Although the alliance between the two men takes place in the presence of Marina, she is uncommonly silent during the scene: it is as if the pact between Lysimachus and Pericles has turned Marina into an object of exchange, no longer a subject in her own right.

Feminist critics, of course, have long claimed that exogamy marginalizes women; most notably, Gayle Rubin has pointed out that woman is at once the crucial element in the process of exogamy and the person least empowered by this process:<sup>35</sup>

The exchange of women does not necessarily imply that women are objectified, in the modern sense, since objects in the primitive world are imbued with highly personal qualities. But it does imply a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. (174)

This, in fact, seems to be what happens to Marina: so long as she is a virgin—unclaimed by any man—she develops into a powerful artist, an artist who essentially shapes the recovery of Pericles; but once Pericles agrees to give Marina in marriage to Lysimachus, her role diminishes dramatically: in fact she speaks only one more line in the play.<sup>36</sup> Shakespeare's ideal of dispossession, in other words, remains determined by the conventional Renaissance construction of woman as subordinate to man.<sup>37</sup> The silencing of Marina suggests that Shakespeare is, finally, unable to sustain the notion of woman as much more than an object, despite his condemnation of Antiochus for turning his daughter into a textual object.<sup>38</sup>

But what is, finally, significant about Shakespeare's portrayal of Marina is not so much her diminishment via the process of exogamy—this process, after all, is conventional to Renaissance culture; rather, it is the

extended space that Shakespeare dedicates to representing Marina as a consummate artist and subject in her own right. For, in the interval between Marina's separation from Pericles and her eventual absorption into the institution of marriage, Shakespeare dedicates almost two of his acts to Marina's development into an artist whose rhetorical power eclipses not only the speeches given by Gower but also the artistry of Pericles himself. Thus if Marina's alter ego, Antiochus's daughter, appears as an *objet d'art*—a musical instrument to be manipulated by her author (I.i.82-6)—Marina is, from the beginning, presented as a powerful artist and musician (IV.Cho.7-8); she is, in fact, a variety of artists—weaver, embroiderer, lute player, singer, and writer (IV. Cho. 21-28). As the play develops, her artistic talent becomes increasingly mythologized, until she appears to be the exemplary Orpheus, who, with her "sweet harmony / And other chosen attractions, would allure, / And make a batt'ry through his [Pericles's] deafen'd ports" (V.i.44-6).<sup>39</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Marina is able to resist characters who would turn her from subject to object. She evades Dionyza's Antiochus-like attempts to turn her into a static art object—a frozen "monument" inscribed with "glitt'ring golden characters" (IV.iii.42-5): her absence from the tomb that would contain her dramatizes the difficulty of transforming her into a mere *imago* of the artist. Marina is similarly threatened by Boult, who says of her: "She has a good face, speaks well, and has excellent good clothes; there's no farther necessity of qualities can make her be refus'd"; soon after, he adds, "I have drawn her picture" (IV.ii.44-6,91). Another autocratic artist, Boult—encouraged by his mistress Bawd—expects to turn Marina from complex artist into a static, mastered art object, by "castrating" her virginity, much as Antiochus cut off the heads of the suitors: "I must have your maidenhead taken off, or the common hangman shall execute it" (IV.iv. 128-30). But unlike the silent suitors and princess, Marina avails herself of speech to free herself from those who would suppress her.<sup>40</sup>

Shakespeare's presentation of Marina thus seems to embody two opposing concepts at once: on the one hand, he presents her as a subjective artist in her own right, a character who, like her father, generously dispossesses herself to the next generation, which, in turn, will renew her as part of a dynamic family lineage. In this sense, the diminishment of Marina's character may be seen as part of an overarching pattern of constructive dispossession that includes male as well as female characters: just as we saw that Gower gives way to Shakespeare, so Pericles's father gives way to Pericles, who in turn is effaced by Marina, just as she, once married, will apparently give way to her future progeny. On the other hand, Marina's silent absorption into marriage—a silence which contrasts with Pericles's active affirmation of his love for Thaisa—suggests that Shakespeare was, finally, unable to transcend the conceptual limits of Renaissance thought; for this reason he does not represent Marina as an active participant in the system of exogamy.

A similar pattern underlies Shakespeare's presentation of his literary lineage. Despite his generous recognition of his *auctor*, Shakespeare presents Gower in somewhat self-serving terms: the fact that he takes his story from the work of an author who, he suggests, was never enthralling to begin with, allows him to sidestep the challenge of mastering a formidable literary predecessor; and although Shakespeare recognizes Gower's influence over him, he also marginalizes him—limiting his presence to the framing sections of the text.<sup>41</sup> His relationship to his literary successors is similarly self-protective, for he cannily presents his successors as audience rather than as potentially threatening authors who are more likely to outdo him as artist by creating their own, more powerful versions of Pericles.<sup>42</sup>

Yet both of these arguments have another face to them; if Gower is marginalized by Shakespeare, he is also amplified by him:<sup>43</sup> Shakespeare revitalizes his predecessor's work by creating a marginalia of it—by adding to it subtlety and complexity, just as Gower elaborated on the Latin "Apollonius of Tyre."<sup>44</sup> And if Shakespeare takes the easy way out by representing his successors as audience, this evasion nonetheless leaves us free to amplify our own version of the play—as authors, readers, or critics;<sup>45</sup> for the play develops by teaching us not just what moral bits we should digest but also how to read past the text's surface. We are encouraged to engage in this activity when we witness Pericles looking past the glossy surface of Antiochus's daughter, or when we hear Simonides comment that "Opinion's but a fool, that makes us scan / The outward habit by the

inward man" (II.ii.55-6).<sup>46</sup>

The text, then, alternates between an ideal of recognition and moments of repression, between possession and dispossession. This complicated plot is underscored by the play's most famous weakness. The play, as we have it, is illegitimate—a bad quarto that may be only partially by Shakespeare. The corrupt state of the text accidentally reinforces Shakespeare's aesthetics of dispossession. In its present state we cannot worship it as an idolatrous object of Shakespeare's genius, much as Antiochus transforms his daughter into an image to be worshipped; rather its marred surface reinforces the challenge that Gower and Shakespeare leave as an ideal to the readers of *Pericles*—to remember and "re-père" the text by recognizing the problematic relation between the text as we have it and its absent ideal, much as the play itself moves back and forth between the author's instincts for control and the ideal of an openended relationship between writer and reader.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Mihoko Suzuki and the members of her Shakespeare Association seminar on Shakespeare's romances, who first read and commented on the paper from which this article derives. Careful commentary from Gordon Braden, Jay Dobrutzky, Clare Kinney, Dan Kinney, and Tom Prendergast were also invaluable in helping me transform the paper into an article.

<sup>2</sup> Most critics who focus on Gower are more interested in his role as mediator between text and audience; this is particularly true of the commentaries by Eggers, Hillman, Hoeniger (both in his article and in the introduction to his edition of *Pericles*), Knowles, Marshall, Nevo, and Peterson.

<sup>3</sup> Felman goes on to add that, "Any kingdom or possession coming out of the psychoanalytic riddle-solving is, in fact, incestuous, and, as such, is bound to bring about a Plague" (1046, her italics). Similarly, *Pericles* begins with Antiochus—a tyrannical ruler of his kingdom and possessive father—who engages in an incestuous relationship with his daughter; as a result, he dies of plague-like symptoms. For a reading of how this link between tyranny and plague runs through medieval Western literature, see Wallace, 189-90.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss the daughter's status as text later in this article.

<sup>5</sup> I will not address the problems of textual integrity that have dominated discussions of this play. Rather than speculate on what the play was "originally" like, I prefer to work on the play as we have it, following Derek Traversi's contention that "the existence in *Pericles* of a definite unity of purpose can be detected even in the early scenes" (an opinion that can be traced back to Knight, 33) (20). The blood father-daughter lineage that I will also be examining has, of course, been charted by such critics as Frye, Hoy, Knight, Peterson, and Traversi, but they have not developed the analogy between literary and blood lineage in this play.

<sup>6</sup> Given this fantasy, it is interesting that none of the mothers in this play is portrayed as sexually desirable, except Thaisa—who is first presented to us as a daughter.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, the text—like Antiochus's daughter and Marina—may be viewed as an object over which father and son (Gower and Shakespeare) compete to prove their status as creators and procreators. I discuss this paradigm below.

<sup>8</sup> On this concept of originality in the Renaissance, see also the works by Barkan, Guillory, Hathaway, and Weinberg listed in the *Works Cited*. The question of whether sixteenth-century writers were actually more original than their predecessors is not an area that I will explore in the article; more germane to my argument is the extent to which the *idea* of being more original came into its own in this century.

<sup>9</sup> That this problem is a concern for Renaissance writers is particularly central to Quint's discussion of *Don Quixote*. On this problem in other Renaissance authors, see Ferguson on Boccaccio, and Guillory and Kerrigan on Milton.

<sup>10</sup> This abstract contract may, of course, be violated by younger authors who refuse to acknowledge their literary progenitors. As I will argue at the end of the article, the evasion of such issues reveals the extent to which Shakespeare was, finally, unable to fulfill the ideal of dispossession that he sets forth in his play.

<sup>11</sup> This phrase derives from Ben Jonson's famous satire of the play, "On *The New Inn*, Ode: To Himself."

<sup>12</sup> For a different reading of these lines, see Knowles; unlike most critics, Knowles believes that the antecedent to "who" in this quotation is Gower, not the audience of *Pericles*. It would, then, be Gower, not his audience, "who best can justify." If Knowles is right, however, then the phrase sets up a contradiction between the "judgement" of the audience and the "justifying" of Gower.

<sup>13</sup> For a more skeptical reading of Gower's self-sacrificial tendencies, see Dickey, 552. We may find an analogy to this aesthetics of dispossession in Shoshana Felman's assertion that the passing of a text from one generation to the next—an Oedipal text in particular—diminishes the temptation to possess a text absolutely (1025).

<sup>14</sup> On this concept of Petrarchism, see Braden, Freccerò, and Vickers. Antiochus, of course, differs from the classic petrarchan lover by actually sleeping with the object of his affection.

<sup>15</sup> For Lacan's definition of otherness see *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 188 *et passim*. Lacan traces the construction of a unified self to the "mirror stage," in which the child creates a unified concept of himself out of the varied fragments that constitute his psyche (*Ecrits* 1-7). Although Lacan's theories help us to think about *Pericles* in interesting ways, I am not arguing that the text is relentlessly Lacanian: if Lacanian thought illuminates many areas of the text, it does not predict all of them. For a more insistently Lacanian reading of *Pericles*, see Nevo.

<sup>16</sup> For Lacan, the notion of otherness arises from the Oedipal experience: "the ways of what one must do as man or as woman are entirely abandoned to the drama, to the scenario, which is placed in the field of the Other—which, strictly speaking, is the Oedipus complex" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts* 186).

<sup>17</sup> Lacan discusses the notion of the father-as-Law in *The Four Fundamental Concepts*: "The father, the Name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of desire with the structure of law" (34). The concept that the father masters desire by means of his absolute law is illustrated in Antiochus's sexual mastery of his daughter and his mastery of her suitors by means of his riddle-as-law. On the close relationship between Antiochus as incestuous father and as tyrannical ruler, see also Jordan, "Eating the Mother," 337-40 and Relihan, 286-7.

<sup>18</sup> I use "idolatry" in the Augustinian sense—the sense that an idol is a reductive *imago* of the deity which gives the worshipper the illusion that he can control, manipulate, and fix his elusive deity, or beloved. For an extended discussion of this notion of idolatry, see Freccero. This perspective suggests that Shakespeare has been reading not only Gower but also Ovid, with whom Shakespeare shares an ongoing interest in incest, family, and metamorphoses. As Leonard Barkan has shown in his reading of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid, too, equates incest with idolatrous, static, mastered art objects; and just as exogamy, for Ovid, represents a release from obsession, incest, and narcissism, so the written word represents a release from static, self-interested image-making (9).

<sup>19</sup> The stage directions come from the First Quarto of *Pericles*.

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<sup>20</sup> On this aspect of the play, see also Nevo, 37-9, and Stockholder, 18.

<sup>21</sup> G. Wilson Knight expresses this moment as: "the result more of fascination, almost lust, than love" (37).

<sup>22</sup> I have followed the practice of most critics in capitalizing the noun "Other," to differentiate it from the adjective "other."

<sup>23</sup> This paradoxical perspective on mortality is dramatized by Knight, who notes that, in the play, death is a delusion (16)—it is only the denial of death that leads to mortality. The ability to face his mortality is a motif that characterizes Pericles. See also I.i.5; II.i.6-10, 71-6; II.iii.75-6 *et passim*.

<sup>24</sup> My reading of Oedipus here is strongly influenced by Harold Alderman's essay on the hermeneutics of Oedipus.

<sup>25</sup> Nor is Pericles ever presented as an absolute ruler of his kingdom. Even when we see him acting as a ruler, he does not appear as absolute master of his realm: when we first see him in Tyre, he is allowing Helicanus to lecture to him about how he should follow the advice of his counselors (I.ii.35-124). It is interesting, then, that the play ends as Pericles willingly dispossesses himself of Tyre to his daughter and her husband.

<sup>26</sup> Pericles points to this failure of self-recognition in Antiochus when he tells him: "Few love to hear the sins they love to act; / Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it, (I.i.93-4).

<sup>27</sup> On the importance of family lineage in this play, see also Peterson, chapter one.

<sup>28</sup> For a reading of this scene that overlaps with mine, see Stockholder, 22. Dickey, 556-66; Hunt; 3-11, and Relihan, 287-94 present a more skeptical reading of Pericles's tendency toward dispossession.

<sup>29</sup> On Pericles as artist, see also H.iii.15-17.

<sup>30</sup> The contrast between Antiochus's daughter and Thaisa is heightened by the presentation of the suitors in the two kingdoms. Unlike the speechless suitors at Antioch, who are turned into frozen images of Antiochus's castrating power, the young suitors in Pentapolis, wearing emblems that represent their lovelorn states, appear as walking ekphrases—as words expressed as flesh.

<sup>31</sup> On contamination, see Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, chapter two, or Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, chapters seven and eight. On contamination and romance, see Frye, 137. This perspective on Pericles seems to have been first articulated by Knight: "He has not actively sinned, except in giving way to a lustful and cheating fantasy, but the result is immersion into an experience of evil with accompanying disgust and danger" (38). For a religious interpretation of contamination as the Fall of Man, see Marshall's article. Such associations between incest and plague recall, of course, the story of Oedipus.

<sup>32</sup> For Pericles, the threat of incest is clearly bound up with that of censorship. Pericles finds himself stifled by the Law of Antioch: "The great Antiochus, / 'Gainst whom I am too little to contend, / . . . Will think me speaking, though I swear to silence" (I.ii. 17-20). See Cyrus Hoy's essay for an insightful exploration of the father-daughter incest threat as it affects Pericles as well as Antiochus.

<sup>33</sup> On this concept, see Lewis, 160. Benson and Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, discuss this problem as a general preoccupation of Renaissance literature by men.

<sup>34</sup> On this point, see also Adams; 48, Lewis, 160; and Nevo, 47.



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<sup>35</sup> For further developments of this theory, see also Irigaray and Sedgwick.

<sup>36</sup> It is true, however, that this line affirms Marina's newfound identity as her mother's daughter, rather than as a wife-to-be: "My heart/Leaps to be gone into my mother's bosom" (V.iii.44-5).

<sup>37</sup> See also Helms, 330, on Marina's final absorption into patriarchy. On Renaissance constructions of women as subordinate to men, see especially Kelso, Maclean, and Henderson and McManus.

<sup>38</sup> This continual equation of woman with texts (rather than with authors) is compared to exogamy by Levi-Strauss, who tells us that, "the emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, would be objects that were exchanged" (469). Marina's appearance as an object of exchange between men is, then, analogous to the text of *Pericles* itself—the text that Gower gives up to Shakespeare, thus forging a close alliance between the two male artists.

<sup>39</sup> Marina's eloquence and artistry have been commented on by a number of critics. See, for instance, Archibald, 294-99; Dickey, 563; Helms, 328-30; and Kiefer, 217.

<sup>40</sup> That the text, finally, moves past this presentation of Marina as an all-powerful and generous artist to focus instead on the vision of a reunited family, reinforces the notion that Shakespeare, in this play, gives more importance to the idea of a fertile and continuous lineage than he does to the fulfillment of any one individual's desire.

<sup>41</sup> That Shakespeare wishes us to view Gower's text as not entirely interesting is suggested in the first lines of *Pericles*. It is interesting, from this perspective, that he represses the influence of the far more influential Ovid in his text, despite his obvious debts to this literary father.

<sup>42</sup> This emphasis on the audience's inheritance of the text runs from the beginning of the text, where Gower asks us to "accept my rimes" (I.i.16), to the end, where he pleads for us to be "evermore attending" (Epilogue. 17).

<sup>43</sup> On Gower's role as an active author of and within the play, see especially the articles by Hillman and Marshall.

<sup>44</sup> For a chart of amplifications of the riddle, see Adams, 26.

<sup>45</sup> For a fuller discussion of the audience's role in *Pericles*, see Peterson, chapter one.

<sup>46</sup> Shakespeare again calls attention to this process when he has Cleon remark, "who makes the fairest show means most deceit" (I.iv.75), or when he presents Cerimon reading life in the apparently dead Thaisa. This pedagogy of "close reading" is itself a risk for Shakespeare; not only does it give us (his audience) a means by which we may usurp his authorial power by coming up with our own conclusions about the work, but we may learn to be attentive to the places where Shakespeare is, finally, unable to give up his text to the next generation that claims it—when he, for example, gives Marina up to Lysimachus, rather than affirms her continuing subjectivity.

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