

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



***The Adventures of Pericles* presented by the Stratford Festival at the Tom
Patterson Theatre, Stratford, Ontario, 19 June 2015**

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Directed by: Scott Wentworth. With Marion Adler (Goddess Diana; Lychorida), Sean Arbuckle (Pericles), Carla Bennett (Maiden Priest), Wayne Best (Antiochus; Simonides; Gentleman), Alex Black (Knight; Sailor; Tempest victim), Jacqueline Burtney (Maiden Priest; Philoten; Citizen; Tempest victim; Prostitute), David Collins (Messenger; Cerimon), Keith Dinicol (Citizen; Gentleman; Pander), Victor Ertmanis (Attendant; Escanes; Gentleman; First Fisherman; Ship's Master; Pirate), Ryan Gifford (Knight; Sailor; Tempest victim), Deborah Hay (Antiochus's Daughter; Thaisa; Marina), Sean Alexander Hauk (Knight; Pirate; Sailor; Tempest victim), Jessica B. Hill (Maiden Priest), Randy Hughson (Attendant; Gentleman; Bolt), Robin Hutton (Maiden Priest; Citizen; Tempest victim; Prostitute), Ethan Lafleur (Lord; Footman), Claire Lautier (Dionyza), Jamie Mac (Lord; Third Fisherman; Pirate; Tempest victim), Stephen Russell (Helicanus), E. B. Smith (Thaliard; Leonine; Gentleman; Tempest victim), Jane Spidell (Maiden Priest; Citizen; Philomen), Rylan Wilkie (Cleon; Third Gentleman; Tempest victim), Brigit Wilson (Citizen; Bawd; Tempest victim), Jonathan Winsby (Knight; Sailor), Antoine Yared (Lord; Second Fisherman; Lysimachus).

Staged at the Stratford Festival, *The Adventures of Pericles* was a rich and pleasing production. At every turn, it was clear that thought had gone into the staging and that the performers had a deep understanding of the play; so much so, that had Ben Jonson – who famously declared *Pericles* to be a stale 'mouldy tale' – seen this rendering of Shakespeare's globe-trotting romance, he would have stood up and applauded. The Tom Patterson Theatre also proved to be an ideal location for the production; the cavernous space, with its exposed wood roof and riggings, gave the feeling that we were seated in the belly of an upturned ship.

The play opened with the cast moving about the stage, circling Antiochus' Daughter, before settling in Antioch proper. Here, Wayne Best's Antiochus was at once chillingly ingratiating and dangerously paranoid; his fear at Pericles' discovery was palpable and he twitched like a trapped animal when plotting with Thaliard. Macabre humour was added by the sudden reveal to Pericles of princes' skulls neatly lined up in an elegant candle-lit cabinet; in Antioch, beauty and danger went hand in hand. Antiochus' Daughter was marked as a victim of her father's incestuous desire; her good wishes to Pericles are her only lines in the script, but it was evident that she had invested all her hopes of rescue in this new suitor. Later, she sat listlessly on Antiochus' bed as he made plans to have the young prince killed; her silent exit was a judgement on her father and a display of her rejection of him.

When Pericles arrived in Tarsus, the city and its inhabitants were a pitiful lot. The Dickensian famine victims huddled together in their hunger and poverty, but the group broke into a joyous song at Pericles' act of charity (thankfully *Oliver Twist* did not make an appearance). Here and elsewhere, it seemed that the production might morph into *Pericles: The Musical*; we had seen Antiochus' Daughter sing the riddle; later Pericles would sing in his bed of his love for Thaisa; and of course Marina would sing to heal her ailing father. However, it is a testament to the strength of the production that the added songs quickly became part of the fabric of the play and complemented the action of the fairy-tale that we had gathered to hear.

Throughout the play, Gower's role as Chorus was taken by Diana, her Maiden Priests, and by the wider cast. This decision was used to great effect in the Tarsus scenes. For example, Gower's lines in Act 4, on Dionyza's envy of and murderous plans for Marina, were shared between the actors playing Cleon and Dionyza and this fleshed out their roles and the plot enormously. Cleon spoke of Marina's talents and beauty and as he did so he gazed on her with great warmth; Dionyza stepped forward to speak bitterly of Marina's overshadowing of Philoten, and her anger at Cleon and hatred for her adopted daughter was evident.

The next stop for Pericles' peregrinations was Pentapolis. The cast as a chorus narrated the storm and shipwreck, and huddled together around Pericles to facilitate a costume change; he emerged from the group in a bedraggled shirt and with a fishnet for a cloak, to be found by the Fishermen on the shores of Pentapolis. King Simonides' court was carefully distinguished from that of Antiochus; geographically, morally, and emotionally, Pericles was in a new world. From his entrance, Simonides possessed the radiant impish cheerfulness of a *Mary Poppins* chimneysweep; the guffawing, swaggering knights were lifted straight from *Monty Python*; and Thaisa, clad in a red

gown right out of *Gone With the Wind*, was a charming debutante whose frivolity distinguished her from Antiochus' pitiful child. Throughout the Pentapolis scenes, there was much laughter from the audience. Before the tournament began, Thaisa dubbed each knight with a sword and she comically provided a sound-effect (a 'ping!') as she tipped the shoulder armour. Later, the knights performed a haka-style dance and the audience roared with laughter as the aged Simonides, enthused by the performance, jumped in and boogied with the younger men. A note of seriousness was struck during the tournament, as Diana interceded to save Pericles from a disguised Thaliard; the goddess would remain a presence throughout the play. Sean Arbuckle gave a fine performance as Pericles, in both his youth and age, and he ably handled the play's shifts in tone as well as the demands placed on him by this production (singing, physical combat etc.) Although the courtiers chuckled at Pericles' ragged state, Thaisa was taken by him and their swift but happy union seemed like a just reward for these two likable, hopeful youths. Thus, the announcement of Thaisa's death was a shock to the audience; there was an audible gasp and the spectacle of Pericles laying his newborn babe beside his dead queen was most affecting.

Several patterns and recurring images were used to tie this episodic tale together. The most central stage property was a four-poster bed, symbolising the circle of life and the interconnectedness of all things; this was the site of Antiochus' incest; of Pericles' restless questioning in Tyre; of Marina's birth and her mother's death; of sexual sickness in the Mitylene brothel; and of reunion for the broken-hearted Pericles and Marina. Antiochus' Daughter appeared in a bridal gown, which Deborah Hay wore again as she stood as Marina's monument in Tarsus, and indeed Hay donned white gowns for her roles as both Thaisa and Marina. The decision to double many roles might have caused confusion for an inattentive spectator, but the doubling did enhance the notion that Pericles was dealing with archetypal figures in a psychosocial drama. For instance, Hay played a series of daughters and prospective brides (Antiochus' Daughter, Thaisa, and Marina) on offer to Pericles, while Wayne Best, as Antiochus and Simonides, presented the young prince with two different paternal and monarchical role models. Doubling also operated as a shorthand for the audience; having seen E. B. Smith as the assassin Thaliard, we knew what to expect when he emerged as Leonine. Although small roles, Smith did much with the little he had; his Leonine even earned pantomime hisses from the audience for his promise to finish off Marina.

The scenes in the Mitylene brothel were lacking in menace and sleaziness was really only hinted at via the inclusion of an ailing prostitute in a bed. The power and influence of Diana was cleverly suggested, however; when Marina prayed to Diana for succour, the goddess moved from the stage edge to stand before her and the young virgin was

comforted. The Bawd and Bolt, however, could not see Diana and her priestesses and merely laughed at Marina's foolishness. Marina gave a lengthy and impassioned speech to convert Lysimachus and his sudden reformation, and later marriage plans, worked well within the framework of this production. Although some sense of real danger would have strengthened the interaction between Marina and Bolt, there were moments of off-beat humour instead. When Bolt decided to help Marina escape the brothel, he demanded some reward for his meagre assistance. Bolt picked up Marina's hand and, while she looked on in amazement, made her pet his head, while he quivered like an old mongrel enjoying a good scratch; pleasing his (economic or moral) superiors seemed to be the highpoint in life for this Bolt.

The reunion scenes at the close of the play were moving and, again, showed one of the thoughts behind this production, namely that everything is interconnected and the individual is always part of larger patterns. On board Pericles' ship, Marina's song to her father echoed his earlier love song and the riddle sung by Antiochus' Daughter. At Ephesus, Marion Adler's Diana, who had influenced the action and hovered on the borders of the stage for much of the play, now stepped forward as the aged Thaisa. Although physically separated by space and time then, the near constant presence of Diana on stage and the doubling of Adler as Diana/Lychorida/aged Thaisa, and of Hay as Marina/young Thaisa, meant that Pericles' family were always together in spirit. Reunited with his family, Pericles' cry of 'No more, you gods!' elicited laughter from the audience; his mis/fortunes had bordered on the ridiculous, and both Pericles and the audience were relieved to finally have an ending, and a happy one at that.