

Pericles, Prince of Tyre

Sc.1

Enter Gower as Prologue

GOWER

To sing a song that old was sung
From ashes ancient Gower is come,
Assuming man's infirmities
To glad your ear and please your eyes.
It hath been sung at festivals, 5
On ember-eves and holy-ales,
And lords and ladies in their lives
Have read it for restoratives.
The purchase is to make men glorious,
Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius. 10
If you, born in these latter times
When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,
And that to hear an old man sing
May to your wishes pleasure bring,
I life would wish, and that I might 15
Waste it for you like taper-light.
This' Antioch, then; Antiochus the Great
Built up this city for his chiefest seat,
The fairest in all Syria.
I tell you what mine authors say. 20
This king unto him took a fere
Who died, and left a female heir
So buxom, blithe, and full of face
As heav'n had lent her all his grace,
With whom the father liking took, 25
And her to incest did provoke.
Bad child, worse father, to entice his own
To evil should be done by none.
By custom what they did begin
Was with long use account' no sin. 30
The beauty of this sinful dame
Made many princes thither frame
To seek her as a bedfellow,
In marriage pleasures playfellow,

Which to prevent he made a law 35
To keep her still, and men in awe,
That whoso asked her for his wife,
His riddle told not, lost his life.

So for her many a wight did die,
[A row of heads is revealed]

As yon grim looks do testify. 40

What now ensues, to th' judgement of your eye
I give, my cause who best can justify.

Exit

*[Sennet.] Enter King Antiochus, Prince Pericles, and
[lords and peers in their richest ornaments]*

ANTIOCHUS

Young Prince of Tyre, you have at large received
The danger of the task you undertake.

PERICLES

I have, Antiochus, and with a soul 45
Emboldened with the glory of her praise
Think death no hazard in this enterprise.

ANTIOCHUS Music!

Music sounds

Bring in our daughter, clotheÁd like a bride
Fit for th'embracements ev'n of Jove himself, 50
At whose conception, till Lucina reigned,
Nature this dowry gave to glad her presence:
The senate-house of planets all did sit,
In her their best perfections to knit.

Enter Antiochus' Daughter

PERICLES

See where she comes, apparelled like the spring, 55
Graces her subjects, and her thoughts the king
Of ev'ry virtue gives renown to men;
Her face the book of praises, where is read
Nothing but curious pleasures, as from thence
Sorrow were ever razed and testy wrath 60
Could never be her mild companion.
You gods that made me man, and sway in love,
That have inflamed desire in my breast
To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree
Or die in the adventure, be my helps, 65

As I am son and servant to your will,
To compass such a boundless happiness.

ANTIOCHUS Prince Pericles±±

PERICLES

That would be son to great Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

Before thee stands this fair Hesperides, 70

With golden fruit, but dang'rous to be touched,

[He gestures towards the heads]

For death-like dragons here affright thee hard.

[He gestures towards his daughter]

Her heav'n-like face enticeth thee to view

Her countless glory, which desert must gain;

And which without desert, because thine eye 75

Presumes to reach, all the whole heap must die.

Yon sometimes famous princes, like thyself

Drawn by report, advent'rous by desire,

Tell thee with speechless tongues and semblants

bloodless

That without covering save yon field of stars 80

Here they stand, martyrs slain in Cupid's wars,

And with dead cheeks advise thee to desist

From going on death's net, whom none resist.

PERICLES

Antiochus, I thank thee, who hath taught

My frail mortality to know itself, 85

And by those fearful objects to prepare

This body, like to them, to what I must;

For death remembered should be like a mirror

Who tells us life's but breath, to trust it error.

I'll make my will then, and, as sick men do, 90

Who know the world, see heav'n, but feeling woe

Grip not at earthly joys as erst they did,

So I bequeath a happy peace to you

And all good men, as ev'ry prince should do;

My riches to the earth from whence they came, 95

(To the Daughter) But my unspotted fire of love to you.

(To Antiochus) Thus ready for the way of life or death,

I wait the sharpest blow, Antiochus.

ANTIOCHUS

Scorning advice, read the conclusion then,
[He angrily throws down the riddle]
Which read and not expounded, 'tis decreed, 100
As these before thee, thou thyself shalt bleed.

DAUGHTER *(to Pericles)*

Of all 'sayed yet, mayst thou prove prosperous;
Of all 'sayed yet, I wish thee happiness.

PERICLES

Like a bold champion I assume the lists,
Nor ask advice of any other thought 105
But faithfulness and courage.

[He takes up and] reads aloud the riddle

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labour
I found that kindness in a father. 110
He's father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife, and yet his child.
How this may be and yet in two,
As you will live resolve it you.

Sharp physic is the last. *[Aside]* But O, you powers 115
That gives heav'n countless eyes to view men's acts,
Why cloud they not their sights perpetually
If this be true which makes me pale to read it?

[He gazes on the Daughter]

Fair glass of light, I loved you, and could still,
Were not this glorious casket stored with ill. 120

But I must tell you now my thoughts revolt,
For he's no man on whom perfections wait
That, knowing sin within, will touch the gate.
You're a fair viol, and your sense the strings
Who, fingered to make man his lawful music, 125
Would draw heav'n down and all the gods to hearken,
But, being played upon before your time,
Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime.

Good sooth, I care not for you.

ANTIOCHUS

Prince Pericles, touch not, upon thy life, 130
For that's an article within our law
As dang'rous as the rest. Your time's expired.

Either expound now, or receive your sentence.

PERICLES Great King,

Few love to hear the sins they love to act. 135

'Twould braid yourself too near for me to tell it.

Who has a book of all that monarchs do,

He's more secure to keep it shut than shown,

For vice repeated, like the wand'ring wind,

Blows dust in others' eyes to spread itself; 140

And yet the end of all is bought thus dear,

The breath is gone, and the sore eyes see clear

To stop the air would hurt them. The blind mole casts

Copped hills towards heav'n to tell the earth is thronged 145

By man's oppression, and the poor worm doth die for't.

Kings are earth's gods; in vice their law's their will,

And if Jove stray, who dares say Jove doth ill?

It is enough you know, and it is fit,

What being more known grows worse, to smother it.

All love the womb that their first being bred; 150

Then give my tongue like leave to love my head.

ANTIOCHUS (*aside*)

Heav'n, that I had thy head! He's found the meaning.

But I will gloze with him. ±±Young Prince of Tyre,

Though by the tenor of our strict edict,

Your exposition misinterpreting, 155

We might proceed to cancel of your days,

Yet hope, succeeding from so fair a tree

As your fair self, doth tune us otherwise.

Forty days longer we do respite you,

If by which time our secret be undone, 160

This mercy shows we'll joy in such a son.

And until then your entertain shall be

As doth befit your worth and our degree.

[Flourish.] Exeunt all but Pericles

PERICLES

How courtesy would seem to cover sin

When what is done is like an hypocrite, 165

The which is good in nothing but in sight.

If it be true that I interpret false,

Then were it certain you were not so bad

As with foul incest to abuse your soul,

Where now you're both a father and a son 170
 By your uncomely claspings with your child±±
 Which pleasures fits a husband, not a father±±
 And she, an eater of her mother's flesh,
 By the defiling of her parents' bed,
 And both like serpents are, who though they feed 175
 On sweetest flowers, yet they poison breed.
 Antioch, farewell, for wisdom sees those men
 Blush not in actions blacker than the night
 Will 'schew no course to keep them from the light.
 One sin, I know, another doth provoke. 180
 Murder's as near to lust as flame to smoke.
 Poison and treason are the hands of sin,
 Ay, and the targets to put off the shame.
 Then, lest my life be cropped to keep you clear,
 By flight I'll shun the danger which I fear. 185

Exit

Enter Antiochus

ANTIOCHUS

He hath found the meaning, for the which we mean
 To have his head. He must not live
 To trumpet forth my infamy, nor tell the world
 Antiochus doth sin in such a loatheÁd manner,
 And therefore instantly this prince must die, 190
 For by his fall my honour must keep high.
 Who attends us there?

Enter Thaliart

THALIART Doth your highness call?

ANTIOCHUS

Thaliart, you are of our chamber, Thaliart,
 And to your secrecy our mind partakes
 Her private actions. For your faithfulness 195
 We will advance you, Thaliart. Behold,
 Here's poison, and here's gold.
 We hate the Prince of Tyre, and thou must kill him.
 It fits thee not to ask the reason. Why?
 Because we bid it. Say, is it done? 200

THALIART My lord, 'tis done.

ANTIOCHUS Enough.

Enter a Messenger hastily

Let your breath cool yourself, telling your haste.

MESSENGER

Your majesty, Prince Pericles is fled.

[Exit]

ANTIOCHUS *(to Thaliart)*

As thou wilt live, fly after; like an arrow 205
Shot from a well-experienced archer hits
The mark his eye doth level at, so thou
Never return unless it be to say
'Your majesty, Prince Pericles is dead.'

THALIART

If I can get him in my pistol's length 210
I'll make him sure enough. Farewell, your highness.

ANTIOCHUS

Thaliart, adieu.

[Exit Thaliart]

Till Pericles be dead

My heart can lend no succour to my head.

Exit. [The heads are concealed]