



# Writ in the Margins Podcast

Created by the students in REN670: Dramaturgy in the Shakespeare and Performance graduate program at Mary Baldwin University

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## Episode Guide

### Season 3, Episode 4

*Pericles: Verse Environments, Prose Places*

Hosts: Godfred Ogoe and Jim Drake

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*A note on content: This episode includes discussions of sex work, incest, and misogyny as well as brief mentions of physical violence.*

## Episode Resources

“ecocriticism, n.”. *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6792408909>.

Mentz, S. (2010) “Strange weather in *King Lear*.” *Shakespeare*, 6(2), pp. 139–152.

Shakespeare, W. and G. Wilkins. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Ed. Suzanne Gossett. Arden Shakespeare, 2004.

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## Episode Transcript

*Intro music*

**Ogoe:** Hello everyone, my name is Ogoe.

**Jim:** And I am Jim. Welcome to the Writ in the Margins podcast, where we discuss any and all things Shakespeare, early modern, and theatrical, for the Ren 670 Dramaturgy class. In this episode, we will be discussing William Shakespeare's *Pericles* (written in 1608) and will be dissecting the play through the lens of ecocriticism, and seeing what opportunities arise for actors, directors, dramaturgs, when we look at the environment these characters are in.

**Ogoe:** The intentionality of this episode is to bring to light what directors little, or fail, consider when unpacking the play's physical dramaturgy to (re)present the play onstage. After listening to this podcast, we want you to have more tools in the tool box and perhaps expose you to a new approach of finding character. Now, understanding the play's concept is the path to take in order to appreciate our work, so Jim will summarize the play.

**Jim:** The play *Pericles* begins with a young prince of Tyre on the search for a princess to marry; he begins to search by meeting a King by the name of Antiochus and his daughter and he must find a way to solve a riddle in order to get her hand in marriage. But the answer to that riddle quite frankly is rather disturbing in that they are an insensuous couple, and anyone who finds out gets killed. Pericles decides, and rightly so, to bail. To keep the secret from getting out Antiochus decides to send an assassin to try to kill Pericles. Helicanus, who is a friend of Pericles, informs him of this, and after he returns to Tyre Pericles decides to leave once again until the heat dies down. Upon leaving Tyre he is caught up in a storm that casts Pericles ashore where he learns of a tournament to win the hand of Thaisia. Pericles wins and the two are married, and after a while becomes pregnant. (Thaisia not Pericles) Pericles is then given word that if he does not return to Tyre under a certain amount of time, then he will lose his lordship in Tyre and it will be given to his friend Helicanus. This is when Pericles decides to hop on a boat with his pregnant wife!! along with the worst midwife I have ever seen in a show, and their ship is hit by another storm. As the storm is blowing Thaisia gives birth to Marina but is left in a heavily unconscious state which is perceived as death. Being persuaded by the fishermen, Pericles puts his wife in a very very sturdy box, fills it with things that smell sweet and valuables like Gold, Gems, things like that and then throws her overboard. Thaisia is then found by several villagers and is resurrected by Cerimon who takes her to the Temple of Diana. Fast forward sometime later Marina has grown up significantly and is kidnapped by Pirates to become a prostitute in a Bawdy house run by a character named Bawd. Pericles believing his daughter to be dead is brought to this body house in hopes of being cheered up when in actuality he finds his daughter. Pericles then receives a vision to return to the Temple of Diana where he finds his wife whom he thought was dead. The wife informs Pericles that her father is dead and Pericles decides that his daughter and her betrothed Will Rule Tyre, and Pericles and his wife will return to Tyson's Homeland and Rule there. and everyone that's happily ever after. Now I know that wasn't exactly the most detailed summary, but other than that:

Now with all that said, what do you think about this play, Ogoe?

**Ogoe:** I think that this play motivates us to ask many, endless questions that seem to have no answers within the

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play, questions that we as dramaturgs need to answer by ourselves. What has preoccupied me over and over again is whether Pericles' journeying around is a matter of fate or a matter of influence from an unseen presence. I would not hesitate to say that this character's wandering about mimics the biblical Apostle Paul, who was heavily persecuted in his preachings about Christ. What do you also think?

**Jim:** I thought the play was Surprisingly fun. I had never really read this play previously. I know that the ASC had put it on at some point last semester but I had never actually seen or read the play before but now having read it it really feels..... It almost feels like an 80s movie. You know in that sort of way that a lot of '80s movies seem to be either very magical or kind of magical though fairly grounded it seems to really fit into that feel that sort of fairy tale-esque kind of mentality. I think in a way that makes it a very fun play to sit down and approach theatrically because there's just a lot that you can sort of do and play especially with not only the grounded moments but also the magical moments that this play has.

Did you have a favorite character, Ogoe?

**Ogoe:** With respect to that, I will select the First Sailor due to his conservationist-style. Serving as the pillar of customs, the first sailor overrides on Pericles's faith by letting him do what Pericles considers as superstitious, thus throwing Thaisa into the sea. As a matter of fact, if just a sailor could do so to Pericles, not even allowing him to grant his fair queen good burial, as minor as this character is, his influence is major, something I cannot avoid thinking about.

**Jim:** Favorite character wise I think my favorite character is probably either Pericles, Cerimon, or Bawd. Pericles: because he is the main character. he is the main vehicle as to which this whole story seems to follow and I really admire his ability to sort of blend into other cultures and he has really given form to the phrase "When in Rome" in that he is really adapted to just about every place that he has been to, and he has a seemingly sincere lack of prejudice for these for these cultures I mean the Antiochus aside in Syria he seems to have no real prejudice against any of these cultures. At least that we can see on the page and I found that very admirable.

So, Jim, since you have made an essential point about Pericles' moving across cultures, it means that different environments play a major role in this play—and that has made this play a complex one. We were thinking about ecocriticism. What is its strength for this play?

**Jim:** For those of you who may not have heard of this theory before, Ecocriticism is defined in the OED as : "The interdisciplinary field of study which explores how the natural world is portrayed in literature, esp. in relation to modern environmental or ecological concerns. There are multiple waves of this movement as described in an article written by Derek Gladwin on Oxford bibliographies .com, that show how this movement has changed as time passed. Galdwin states: "The "first wave" of ecocriticism tended to take a dehistoricized approach to "nature," often overlooking more political and theoretical dimensions and tending toward a celebratory approach of wilderness and nature writing. Ecocriticism expanded into a "second wave," offering new ways of approaching literary analysis by, for example, theorizing and deconstructing human-centered

scholarship in ecostudies; imperialism and ecological degradation; agency for animals and plants; gender and race as ecological concepts; and problems of scale. The "third wave" advocates for a global understanding of ecocritical

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practice through issues like global warming; it combines elements from the first and second waves but aims to move beyond Anglo-American prominence.

**Ogoe:** Interesting! So, Ecocriticism makes use of the elements (like: fire, water, earth, air), as Steve Mentz describes. Using the theory to explore King Lear Mentz states:

“My focus on King Lear’s representations of the strained relationship between human bodies and the non-human environment aims to critique some current trends in literary-ecocriticism. The play’s vision of human disharmony with the surrounding world of nature sharply rebuts the pastoral and Romantic ideas that still subtend much eco-critical thought in the humanities. Shakespeare’s portrayal of dis-equilibrium leaps over pastoral homeostasis to anticipate the new ecology’s insight that fantasies about harmony and stability do not adequately represent natural systems..... King Lear’s representation of how dis-harmonious nature disrupts human meaning-making systems makes a parallel critique of early modern understandings of the humanity/ nature relationship.”

In this quotation, Mentz is advocating that the storms that are in the surroundings of Lear are a metaphysical representation of the disharmony within himself. In short, Lear's imbalance is a given form. In terms of Pericles, much like the article that mentions King Lear, the multiple storms offer moments of playable action on stage. And we will discuss it from here.

**Jim:** In the first storm, could be a metaphysical manifestation of Pericles’s frustration, and while he doesn't have lines, maybe a moment of transition from one scene to the next, where we as an audience get to see his anger and frustration given form as the shipwreck takes place. The second storm could be a manifestation of Pericles's anxiety, Or the manifestation of the birth of Marina. If the storm gets stronger as the labor goes on, the actress playing Thaisa could match vocals as the storm rages or the actress could be silent while the storm vocalizes her birth pains.

While water does make multiple appearances, the element of earth appears as well. In lines 32-38

“Tis known, I ever

Have studied physic; through which secret art,

By turning o’er authorities, I have,

Together with my practice, made familiar

To me and to my aid the blest infusions

That dwells in vegetives, in metals, stones;

And can speak of the disturbances.....” ( Shakespeare, 3.2.32-38)

This quote describes how Cerimon uses what comes from the earth as a means of healing, and does so with

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Thaisa in order to revive her. In terms of performance, does Cerimon find the use of these elements a religious experience? Does he keep these ingredients close by, so they can be played with during the scene (providing stage business)?

**Ogoe:** That's great! And in terms of characters, these environmental issues get even stronger. The title character alone went from Syria to Tyre, to Tarsus, Petapolis, Ephesus, Mytilene, the temple of Dionysia, then back to Pentapolis after reuniting with his wife. Each of these locations created new challenges for him to overcome or adapt to, which have a hand in changing the story. Not to mention the multiple storms and elemental situations that he has come in contact with throughout this story.

Now as previously mentioned Pericles comes in contact with many different kinds of environments, which I have earlier listed. And as I had previously mentioned before each one of these places created a new challenge for Pericles that he had to adapt to as a character thereby affecting him and the story being told. We see this form of adaptation once again when Pericles is faced with the information of this tournament for the hand of Thaisa. Namely, this takes place in act 2 scene 1, where Pericles meets with these fishermen and receives the information after being shipwrecked for the first time. We can see Pericles adapting to his environment, when we look at the text itself: thus Pericles shifts from the verse which he usually speaks to nobles to prose. On stage, he speaks in verse when he is giving an aside to the audience or when he is speaking to another noble person, but when he is faced with these common folks, thus these three fishermen that come into the scene, he changes his way of speaking to prose—which means that he is literally speaking their language and living their culture.

PERICLES

A man whom both the waters and the wind,

In that vast tennis-court, hath made the ball

For them to play upon, entreats you pity him.

He asks of you that never us'd to beg.

He then later switches to lines to shorter prose lines like these:

PERICLES I thank you, sir.

SECOND FISHERMAN Hark you, my friend. You said you  
could not beg?

PERICLES I did but crave.

SECOND FISHERMAN But crave? Then I'll turn craver  
too, and so I shall 'scape whipping.

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PERICLES Why, are your beggars whipped, then?

**Jim:** In terms of performance. This means that an actor could put on a similar accent or dialect to these fishermen. Or, take a moment to have a costume change to seem more peasant like. Is he trying to hide as a noble? Or is he being upfront about his identity to these men. With a simple change of his environment multiple acting and directorial choices can emerge.

Another example of Pericles becoming a chameleon to his environment is during the second storm that Pericles is faced with while driving traveling back to Tire with his pregnant

wife and midwife Act 3 scene 1 lines 45-51. After Thaisa dies Pericles is urged to throw her overboard due to customs of the sailors on the ship.

FIRST SAILOR

Sir, your queen must overboard. The sea works high, the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be clear'd of the dead.

PERICLES

That's your superstition.

FIRST SAILOR

Pardon us, sir; with us at sea it hath been still observ'd, and we are strong in custom; therefore briefly yield 'er, for she must overboard straight." (Shakespeare, 3.1.45-47)

**Ogoe:** While examining the text we can see that not only is Pericles speaking in prose again while speaking to the sailors but also he is deciding to adhere to the customs of these fishermen in order to keep the peace seemingly. In terms of directorial choices that can be made with this Pericles can choose to do this to keep the peace or could he be forced to do this and the sailors might mutiny if they don't get their way? Could this be a moment of heated debate? a moment of ceremony? Why do Sailors have this superstition? All of these questions and playable choices are products of the environment that these characters are in.

Now Bawd is a very interesting character because, unlike Pericles who the environment colonizes his language and culture, she seems to exhibit manly traits resulting from the environmental influence. Is a very business savvy character and runs the inn and the girls that work as prostitutes inside of that inn. Now, being a business owner and running a brothel can be seen as very masculine trades to be in so much that in lines 40-42 of Act 4 scene 2 Marina question's her identity.

BAWD

Yes indeed shall you, and taste gentlemen of all fashions. You shall fare well, you shall have the difference of all complexions. What do you stop your ears?

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MARINA

Are you a woman?

BAWD

What would you have me be, and I be not a woman?

MARINA

An honest woman, or not a woman. “( Shakespeare, 4.2.40-42)

On the Ecocriticism side of this interaction, bawd must be a very tough, slick, and fairly strong business character on stage. Therefore, the actor playing Bawd can make the choice to have a strong and intimidating self in order to get the job done. Has bawd been questioned about this before, and finds humor in the question? Is she busy having some form of stage business cleaning a table, and forcing marina to help? These are choices to be made because Bawd was affected by the environment.

**Jim:** Alrighty folks were just about at time: we hope that we gave you all a little something to think about, as well as an applicable means of helping you find things to play with in this show. Please give a listen to Cece Richardson, and Anna Bingams episode as well, as they were assigned this play along with us, and don't forget to give the rest of the folks in this season some love as well Thank you!

*Outro music*