

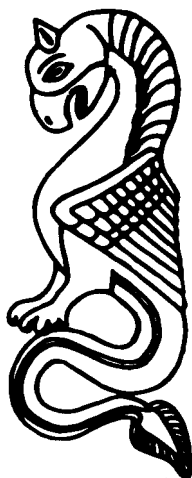
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Pericles and the Simpsons

Ian Wood

It is well known that the company of players led by Christopher and Robert Simpson from Egton in the North Riding of Yorkshire included *Pericles*, at the time a relatively new play, in their repertoire during the winter of 1608-09.¹ It is equally well known that the Simpsons were recusants.² This information, however, has not impinged as much as might have been expected on efforts to interpret the earliest of Shakespeare's romances.³ Perhaps scholars have assumed that the players would have imposed their own reading on the text, and not produced a performance that the play's authors would have recognised. Certainly the Simpsons did adapt at least one of the plays they performed to suit recusant audiences.⁴ *Pericles*, moreover, is thought to have been presented for 'oppositional as well as state purposes'.⁵ It is worth pausing to look closely to see whether the performances by the Simpsons, or Lord Cholmley's Men as they are often known to modern scholars,⁶ might have imposed meaning on the text, or whether they would merely have exposed aspects of the script which might have been dealt with more surreptitiously in London.

Sir John Yorke, the owner of Gowthwaite Hall in Nidderdale, 'belonged to the category of people who were known, not as recusants, but as "popishly affected"'.⁷ He was related, on his mother's side to a Jesuit, Francis Ingleby, who was executed in 1586, and to a number of the Gunpowder plotters. Indeed Yorke himself was accused of complicity in the plot, although no charge was brought.⁸ What did bring Yorke before Star Chamber was a performance at Candlemas 1609 by the Simpsons and their company.⁹ Their repertoire included *King Lear* and *Pericles*, though the plays proposed to Yorke were apparently *Saint Christopher and The Three Shirleys* (or *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers*) by George Wilkins, John Day and William Rowley.¹⁰ Wilkins, is now recognised, of course, as the co-author, with Shakespeare, of *Pericles*. Yorke

chose the Saint Christopher play. In itself it was an innocuous work, but an interlude was inserted into it in which a catholic priest debated with an English minister, at the end of which the priest was led to heaven by an angel and the minister to Hell by the devil.¹¹ This interlude was only included by the players when they thought that their audience was pro-catholic.¹² Since Yorke's tenants were all recusants,¹³ and since Yorke himself tried to keep an eye on those admitted to the performance,¹⁴ the Simpsons felt free to insert the scene when performing at Gowthwaite. Unfortunately a certain William Stubbs managed to join the audience. He subsequently informed Sir Stephen Procter,¹⁵ 'monopolist, priest hunter and demolisher of Fountains Abbey',¹⁶ in addition, it seems, to being a liar and congenital litigant.¹⁷ After a delay of two years, Yorke was accused not only of 'causing a seditious interlude', but also of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot and of harbouring seminary priests.¹⁸ Ultimately Yorke was merely charged with 'permitting the Simpson players to present an interlude, by which the established religion was brought into derision', and attempting to suborn witnesses.¹⁹

The remarkable documentation for the Simpsons at Gowthwaite is rather less informative about *Pericles* than many modern allusions imply. According to the Star Chamber testimony of William Harrison, who was the company's clown, two plays were performed at Yorke's house:

One of the plays acted and played [. . .] was Perocles, prince of Tire, And the other was Kinge Lere [. . .] these plaies which they so plaied were usual plaies And such as were acted in Common and publick places and staiges[. . .] and such as were played publiquely [. . .] and prynted in the bookes.²⁰

It has, however, been suggested that Harrison's testimony was inaccurate, and was intended to draw attention away from the actual performance of the Saint Christopher.²¹ It is, thus, uncertain whether the Simpson's really did perform *Pericles* at Gowthwaite. And there is not a shred of evidence to suggest, as has been argued, that the company introduced a guardian angel to protect Marina in the brothel scenes.²²

There are, however, points about *Pericles* that may be inferred from the information relating to the Candlemas celebrations at Gowthwaite. As already noted, the Yorke house in Nidderdale was a centre of recusancy, and the

Simpsons were essentially a recusant company. While their choice of plays was acceptable to the authorities, in that they had all supposedly been printed,²³ the Simpsons did adapt the Saint Christopher play to please catholic taste. *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* would certainly have been appreciated by a catholic audience, since the Shirley brothers were themselves catholic, and the play includes a visit by Sir Anthony Shirley to 'his holinesse' the pope.²⁴ As for *King Lear*, it has been suggested that the play's interest in exorcism and demoniacs could have appealed to Catholics²⁵ – though one might wonder whether protestants would have found the topic any less interesting. King James famously had an interest in the occult. What then of *Pericles*?

In addition to the inclusion of *Pericles* in the repertoire of the Simpsons, there is also the evidence for performances of the play before ambassadors of catholic countries,²⁶ as well as the striking fact that a copy of *Pericles* is recorded in a 1619 list of books held in the library of the recusant centre at Saint-Omer in the Spanish Netherlands.²⁷ The catalogue includes 124 books, and *Pericles*, according to William Schrickx is 'the only work of imaginative literature in a long list of devotional and controversial works'.²⁸ It would appear that the play was not only popular, but it was particularly prized by Catholics or recusants.

Although the story of *Pericles*, or rather Apollonius, originated in a Greek romance, the play, which is deliberately introduced by the pre-Reformation Englishman Gower, clearly draws on biblical stories. It is littered with allusions which would seem to direct attention to the Bible and to Christian doctrine.²⁹ At times it reads like a parable. Gower states:

I'll show you those in troubles reign,
Losing a mite, a mountain gain.³⁰

There are the 'resurrections' of Thaisa and Marina, both thought dead, supposedly buried and then found alive. Allusions to the stories of Jonah, Job and Tobit have all been noted.³¹ In addition the influence of miracle plays dealing with Tobit and with Mary Magdalene has been hypothesised.³² There is also the explicit reference to the death of Antiochus IV,³³ drawn from 2 Maccabees 9 – of which a good deal has already been made.³⁴ In fact, although Antiochus was used as a metaphor for religious tyranny, he was so used by both Catholics and Protestants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: his position is, thus, potentially ambivalent. The lines on his death do not, therefore, prove a recusant agenda. And in any case the fate of Antiochus is referred to in the *Confessio*

Amantis.³⁵ It is necessary, therefore, to treat the narration of the tyrant's death in *Pericles* with caution, at least initially. On its own it does not prove that the play was intended to carry a religious message.

The text of *Pericles* would seem, however, to invite the hearer to find a religious meaning from early on in the first scene. Antiochus poses the prince a riddle, which he must solve before he may marry the king's daughter.

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh that did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labour,
I found that kindness in a father,
He's father, son and husband mild;
I mother, wife and yet his child.
How they may be and yet in two,
As you will live resolve it you.³⁶

The riddle can scarcely be thought of as being difficult to solve: it plainly alludes to the incestuous relationship between Antiochus and his child. Its transparency has raised more than one critical eyebrow. Yet surely as important as the meaning of the riddle is its language, which is unquestionably theological: 'father, son and husband mild' is a clear deformation of 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost', while 'mother, wife and yet his child', could be understood as playing on the Virgin's position as mother and (theological) child of Christ. Although Hoeniger argued that the play took the riddle directly from Gower,³⁷ comparison of the two texts reveals just how different they are in terms of expression, for in the *Confessio Amantis* the relevant passage runs:

With felonie I am up bore,
I ete, and have it not forlore
My moders flesshe, whose husbonde
My fader for to seche I fonde,
Which is the sonne eke of my wife
Herof I am inquisitif.³⁸

Equally different in language from the riddle of the play is the version in its other major source, Laurence Twine's *Patterne of Painefull Adventures*:

I am carried with mischiefe, I eate my mothers fleshe; I
seeke my brother my mothers husband and I cannot find him.³⁹

Comparison of the riddle in these three versions suggests clearly that the audience of the play is being deliberately encouraged to think of it in liturgical, if not theological, terms. For an audience as au fait with the basics of Christian doctrine as that of the early seventeenth century, what would have been most notable about Antiochus' riddle is not its lumbering transparency, but its subversion of religious language.⁴⁰ Yet not every editor of *Pericles* has paused to note the blasphemy involved.⁴¹

Towards the end of the play the impurity of Antiochus' riddle is answered in Pericles' response to the realisation that Marina is his daughter, when he cries

Thou that begett'st him that did thee beget [. . .]⁴²

While it has been noted that this statement brings the play full circle,⁴³ the theological allusion involved has not often received the attention it deserves.⁴⁴ The point is more subtle than that made in the Antiochus riddle, and it does not stray into blasphemy: yet it is easy to draw a parallel between Marina and the Virgin Mary, who begat Christ, who, theologically, as God, created her. Anyone with any inkling of Marian doctrine might have seen this. Not that Marina is presented as Mary, but the audience is apparently being encouraged to contemplate the Virgin through the heroine. In other words Marina is presented as a Marian figure in the text of the play: the Simpsons would not have needed to add anything in order to give *Pericles* a catholic twist.

It is worth looking to see whether there are other indications that Marina is being presented as a Marian figure. There is, of course, the constant emphasis on her virginity, though on its own this, and other of the heroine's virtues, scarcely amount to proof of an intended comparison with the Virgin. Of the passages in praise of Marina two of the most striking are not to be found in the Quarto text of the play, but in Wilkins' spin-off novella, *The Painful Adventures of Pericles*.⁴⁵ The Oxford edition of the play has plausibly inserted them into the text. Lysimachus remarks of Marina:

Now surely this is virtue's image, nay
Virtue herself sent down from heaven a while
To reign on earth and teach us what we should be!⁴⁶

And

Thou are a piece of virtue,
The best wrought up that ever nature made.⁴⁷

The fact that the lines can be cast as blank verse suggests that they were indeed taken from the play. Certainly they are of a piece with, and enhance the image of Marina as a holy figure.

At least one other point might be thought to support a Marian reading of Marina. It is often noted that the hero of the original hellenistic story, and indeed of the play's direct sources, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Twine's *Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, is not called Pericles but Apollonius or Apollinus. Shakespeare and Wilkins may have been responsible for renaming the character, although in one French version Apollonius takes the name Perillie, which may suggest that the change of name had already been effected in some lost version.⁴⁸ Scholars, however, have tended not to comment on the parallel fact that in the versions of Gower and Twine Apollonius' daughter is not called Marina, but Thaise or Tharsia. Shakespeare and or Wilkins chose to change the name, assigning that of Thaisa to the wife of Pericles, who in Gower is unnamed, but in Twine is called Lucina. Why the name Thaisa should be switched from daughter to mother, and the daughter then given a new name is surely something which demands explanation. One reason for not calling Pericles' daughter Thaisa might be that the name Thais is associated in Propertius, Ovid, Martial and Terence with courtesans, the last association that one might want for a character whose virginity is central to her role. Wilkins at least, who was enough of a classical scholar to translate Justinus' epitome of Pompeius Trogus, could have known that the name Thaisa had unwanted overtones. As for the name Marina, we are, of course, given a good reason for its choice, 'for she was born at sea.'⁴⁹ But this may not be the only reason that the name Marina is used instead of Thaisa. Indeed the fact that this explanation of the name is repeated on a number of occasions may suggest that it was intended to hide another, and deeper, reason for the choice. The similarity between the names Marina and Maria might be thought too close to be purely coincidental: only a single letter 'n' separates them. That it is not a coincidence may be indicated by Marina's own comment on her birth. She states,

When I was born the wind was in the north.⁵⁰

Given Shakespeare's love of conceits, it is possible that the line deliberately draws attention to the 'n' added to Maria.

Allegorically Maria/Marina, 'that begett'st him that did thee beget,' does more than simply bring the play full circle in answering the initial blasphemy of Antiochus and his daughter. English Catholics would surely have seen in the work of the heroine a call to restore the old faith. Pericles, perhaps to be understood as a metaphor for the man or nation in danger, is restored to wholeness by the virgin Mari(n)a. Something similar might be found at the end of *Cymbeline*, when the aged king unaccountably in strict narrative terms, having just defeated the Roman army, agrees to pay tribute to Rome: not to the wicked Italy of Iachimo, but the just empire, by which a recusant might easily understand the Roman Church. It is a point that is not in Holinshed, and is thus a deliberate addition by Shakespeare.⁵¹

There are, then, reasons for thinking that the Simpsons might have chosen to include *Pericles* in their repertoire because of its theological subtext, and that in playing it before Catholics and crypto-catholics they would have been making patent what was already implicit in the text. *Pericles* was an ideal work for a recusant audience, and it would seem to be a powerful illustration of Shakespeare's crypto-catholicism, which is increasingly noted by a growing number of modern scholars.⁵² It would also seem to indicate that Roger Prior's scrupulous rejection of the identification of George Wilkins with the recusant George Wilkinson,⁵³ was actually a misjudgement, as some have already implied.⁵⁴ Wilkins' justified reputation as a thoroughly violent and unpleasant man⁵⁵ needs to be balanced against his position as a recusant. As for the play itself, in contrasting it with the 'devotional and controversial works' of the Saint-Omer list, William Schrickx perhaps underestimated the extent to which *Pericles* can be read and played as both devotional and controversial.

NOTES

¹ Scholars almost invariably cite Charles J. Sisson's account of the performance, in 'Shakespeare Quartos as Prompt-Copies', *The Review of English Studies*, 18 (1942), 129-43 (pp. 135-42), even though Sisson himself explicitly states that he was largely writing from memory because his notes were lost during the war: p. 129, n. 1: 'The closing of the British Museum and the Public Record Office, with the destruction of my collections and most of my notes, has impeded the proper preparation of this article, and forced me to trust too much to memory'. In the light of this candid admission, scholars ought to have relied more on the fuller account of what happened at Gowthwaite and of the subsequent Star Chamber proceedings of 1614 to be found in Christopher Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale 1565-1634* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939). More recent, and in many respects more valuable, is G. W. Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', *North Yorkshire County Record Office Publications*, no. 7, Journal 3 (April 1976), 95-130.

² On the Simpsons and their company, Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 95, 108, 121-23.

³ The point, originally made by William Schrickx, "'Pericles" in a Book-List of 1619 from the English Jesuit Mission and some of the Play's Special Problems', *Shakespeare Survey*, 29 (1976), 22, still has some validity.

⁴ Sisson, 'Shakespeare Quartos as Prompt-Copies', p. 142.

⁵ Suzanne Gossett, ed., *Pericles, The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2004), p. 87.

⁶ Following Sisson, 'Shakespeare Quartos as Prompt-Copies', pp. 135-36, and Schrickx, "'Pericles" in a Book-List of 1619 from the English Jesuit Mission and some of the Play's Special Problems', p. 23. See also Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 95, 108.

⁷ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 12. For a more recent analysis of the range of catholic commitment, Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993).

⁸ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, pp. 10, 14-15, 27-29, 39-40, 43-44.

⁹ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 23; Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 104.

¹¹ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, pp. 23-26; Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 105-06.

¹² For a repetition of the scandal at Gowthwaite, when the same play was presented at Masham in 1610, Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 107-08.

¹³ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 104-05.

¹⁵ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 21; Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 106.

¹⁶ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, p. 47.

¹⁷ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, pp. 47-58.

¹⁸ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, pp. 27-33.

¹⁹ Howard, *Sir John Yorke of Nidderdale*, pp. 44-45; Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 107.

²⁰ Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 106.

²¹ Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 106.

²² Pace Gossett, ed., *Pericles*, p. 88.

²³ Sisson, 'Shakespeare Quartos as Prompt-Copies', p. 140: see also William Harrison's comment as recorded by Boddy, 'Players of Interludes in North Yorkshire in the Early Seventeenth Century', p. 106.

²⁴ John Day, William Rowley and George Wilkins, *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers: Sir Thomas Shirley, Sir Anthony, Mr Robert. As it is now Play'd by her Maiesties Seruants* (London: John Wright, 1607): Schrickx, "'Pericles'", pp. 23-24.

²⁵ Schrickx, "'Pericles'", p. 24.

²⁶ Schrickx, "'Pericles'", p. 24: also Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), p. 205.

²⁷ Schrickx, "'Pericles'", pp. 21-32.

²⁸ Schrickx, "'Pericles'", p. 22.

²⁹ Biblical parallels are discussed briefly by F. D. Hoeniger in his edition of the play (London: Methuen, 1963), p. xix, and also in the footnotes to the text.

³⁰ *Pericles*, ed. by Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), scene 5, ll. 8-9; Gossett, ed., *Pericles*, Act 2, scene 0, ll. 8-9. Given the variation in numbering of scenes, in what follows scenes will be cited first by the number in Warren's edition, and then in that of Gossett. Hoeniger, ed., *Pericles*, p. 37, n., argues that these lines hint at the underlying thought and purpose of the play.

³¹ Hoeniger, ed., *Pericles*, pp. xviii-xix, lxxxi.

³² Hoeniger, ed., *Pericles*, pp. xc-xci.

³³ Scene 8, ll. 1-13 = Act 2, scene 4, ll. 1-12.

³⁴ Schrickx, "'Pericles'", pp. 24-29. This rather undermines Warren's dismissal of the passage as an awkward intrusion (Warren, ed., *Pericles*, p. 140, n.).

³⁵ Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-75), IV, 395, ll. 1006-10.

³⁶ Scene 1, ll. 107-14 = Act 1, scene 1, ll. 65-72.

³⁷ Hoeniger, ed., *Pericles*, p. xv.

³⁸ Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, VI, 379, ll. 413-18.

³⁹ Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, VI, 428.

⁴⁰ One might compare the perversion of the Book of Common Prayer in *Macbeth*, Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 188.

⁴¹ For an exception, Warren, ed., *Pericles*, p. 98, n. 1.

⁴² Scene 21, l. 184 = Act 5, scene 1, l. 185.

⁴³ Warren, ed. *Pericles*, p. 57. The distorted parallel between Antiochus' daughter and Marina could have been emphasised on stage if the same boy played both parts.

⁴⁴ But see Gossett, ed., *Pericles*, p. 87, commenting that the line 'approximates Marian theology', and p. 120.

⁴⁵ Warren, ed. *Pericles*, p. 287.

⁴⁶ Warren, ed. *Pericles*, scene 19, ll. 146-48.

⁴⁷ Warren, ed. *Pericles*, scene 19, ll. 162-63.

⁴⁸ Hoeniger, ed. *Pericles*, p. xviii.

⁴⁹ Scene 13 = Act III, scene 3, l. 13. Compare scene 21, ll. 145-46 = Act V, scene 1, ll. 146-47, and scene 22, ll. 68-69 = Act V, scene 3, ll. 46-47.

⁵⁰ Scene 15, l. 102 = Act IV, scene 1, l. 49.

⁵¹ W. G. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: The Chronicle and the History Plays Compared*, 2nd edn (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907), pp. 6-18.

⁵² Most notably Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare*, and Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World* (London: Cape, 2004).

⁵³ Roger Prior, 'The Life of George Wilkins', *Shakespeare Survey*, 25 (1972), 137-52 (pp. 142-43).

⁵⁴ For others who have seen Wilkins as a recusant, see Schrickx, "'Pericles'", pp. 23-32, and Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare*, p. 275.

⁵⁵ Most powerfully stated in Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare*, pp. 205-13.