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The Seven Ages of Pericles
by
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Pericles, swept along by the wave of interest in Shakespeare's romances, has lately received its due share of critical and theatrical attention, but it remains something of a bastard child. Pericles was originally labelled a "problem" because of the textual controversy—exclusion from the 1623 folio, evidence of joint authorship—and the label sticks because of the common complaint that the play somehow feels different from the other plays in the canon. Uneven in style and random in structure, it seems almost to provoke disengagement. It actively resists expectations of causal plot and frustrates the urge to identify with characters on stage. This distancing effect has been attributed to the dominance of spectacle and narrative in the play, the result of Shakespeare's conversion of romance narrative into drama. The device of the Chorus, an antiquated stage convention by 1608, and Gower's own antique figure (as Chorus) effectively distance the audience from the dramatized action.

Gower's appearances do more than interrupt the action, however. They in fact separate the play into seven segments. The play's dynamic of alienation becomes meaningful when we realize the significance of this seven-part structure. The seven "acts" delineated by choruses follow in thematic outline the popular medieval historical pattern of the Seven Ages of the World, an analogue to the idea of the Seven Ages of Man. The Seven Ages pattern depends on a Boethian view of time in which history is seen from the perspective of eternity. Because a pattern that shapes the entire course of human history can be perceived only by removing oneself from present time and imagining the entire course of history, an audience of Pericles may well feel distanced. We are forced, by the play's structure, to view Pericles' adventures as a whole, to assume a cosmic perspective. Rather than
simply attributing the strangeness of *Pericles* to a bad text or "other hands," I think we should re-examine the structure of the play, noting its specific parallels with the structure of a Boethian cosmology.

The Boethian metaphysic requires dual consideration of human life from temporal and eternal perspectives. The story of Pericles' life, for instance, seems tragic (why must he wait so long for redemption from sorrow?) or simply meaningless, when viewed from a temporal perspective—just a string of chance misfortunes yielding inexplicably to good luck at the last. From a projected eternal perspective, however, these adventures describe the Seven Ages into which human history was divided by virtually every medieval historian and chronicler, and according to which the Corpus Christi cycles were structured. From this perspective, Pericles becomes exemplary; his story illustrates that hidden patterns may shape even the most random-seeming order of events. Gower is uniquely conceived to serve as intermediary between these two viewpoints, tempering the audience's immediate response to the play's action with his moral commentary, but inspiring, by the patent inadequacy and impracticality of many of his responses, consideration of various perspectives for interpreting the actions onstage. *Pericles* serves as a kind of metaphysical exercise, inviting the audience to assess the significance of the hero's life, his place in the universe.

II

Gower, whose verse and function resemble those of Time as Chorus in *The Winter's Tale*, betrays a remarkably cavalier attitude toward time throughout *Pericles*.

Be attent,  
And time that is so briefly spent  
With your fine fancies quaintly [eche].  

(III.Ch.11–13)*

Thus time we waste, and long leagues make short.  

(IV.iv.1)

Now our sands are almost run,  
More a little, and then dumb.  

(V.ii.1–2)

Shakespeare characteristically handled dramatic improbabilities by facing them head-on; so, in a play whose action spans more than sixteen years, remarks on the proper use of time—both personal and dramatic time—figure prominently. Gower's comments indicate his recognition that, as narrator
of the tale, dramatic time lies at his disposal. But in a more important sense, Gower is free from temporal constraints because, according to the play’s fiction, he is a visitor from the dead, deliberately resurrected to present this story:

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.

(I.Ch.1-4)

The Chorus has “assumed man’s infirmities”—put on a mortal body—in order to relate his didactic tale more convincingly. But earthly time means little to a visitor from the eternal realm:

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
Waste it for you like taper-light.

(I.Ch.11-16)

Gower disprizes earthly time—wastes it “like taper-light”—because he has achieved the perspective of providential time. This notion of “double time” derives from the structure of the Boethian cosmology, which neatly reconciles fortune and providence. Fortune—the course of earthly affairs—is ordered by an omniscient God, who “sees what is fitting for each individual, and arranges what he knows is fitting.” The providential order seems, from the earthly viewpoint, to be the random turning of fortune’s wheel; but if men could achieve the divine perspective, according to Boethius, they “would judge that there was no evil anywhere” in the work of fortune. Human understanding is hampered only by temporal limitation,

for whatever lives in time proceeds in the present from the past into the future, and there is nothing established in time which can embrace the whole space of its life equally…. [But God] is permanent in the simplicity of his present, and embracing all the infinite spaces of the future and the past, [he] considers them in his simple act of knowledge as though they were now going on.
Gower could serve a Jacobean audience appropriately as instructor on Boethian concepts of providence, for the Consolation of Philosophy provided the generic model for John Gower’s Confessio Amantis. Gower’s version of the Apollonius tale (the source for Pericles) in the Confessio emphasizes the role of Fortune:

For this day forth fortune hath sworn
To sette him upward on the whiel;
So goth the world, now wo, now wel.¹⁰

In Pericles, however, the Chorus emphasizes the provisional nature of fortune. He comments on the limited understanding of the hero:

Let Pericles believe his daughter’s dead,
And bear his courses to be ordered
By Lady Fortune....

(IV.iv.46-48)

And in his Epilogue, Gower explicitly notes the relationship between fortune and heaven, observing that Pericles and his family, “Although assail’d with fortune fierce and keen,” were “Led on by heaven, and crown’d with joy at last” (V.iii.88, 90).

The author of a text, like the Boethian God, foresees the promised end of his work and arranges events in accordance with that foreordained future. By resurrecting Gower and allowing him to present his tale to the audience, Shakespeare provides a theatrical image of the author as creator. Even though Gower acknowledges the antiquity of his tale (I.Ch.5-8) and denies actual originality (“I tell you what mine authors say” [I.Ch.20]), he is scarcely a mere spectator. Not only does he interpret the tale, but he is privy to information denied the theatrical audience—his choruses frequently introduce new facts. Gower suggests that he views Pericles’ adventures in their totality, but presents only selected episodes of the life history on stage. At IV.Ch.6, for instance, “our fast-growing scene must find” a mature Marina at Tharsus, where she was left as an infant only one scene previously. Similarly at IV.iv.9-10, Gower reports that “Pericles / Is now again thwarting [the] wayward seas,” suggesting that the hero has taken to sea offstage, that Gower merely discovers him. At V.i.12-13, the Chorus directs “our thoughts again” to Pericles, “Where we left him, on the sea.” The hero has been absent from the audience’s sight but not, evidently, from Gower’s: the Chorus reports “he is arriv’d / Here where his daughter dwells” (14-15). Gower’s authorial omniscience, his suggestion of a foreordained action, implies an action that occurs on two figurative levels. He presents on stage only a portion of the complete life of Pericles, of which he alone has full
knowledge, much as God alone, according to Boethianism, can survey human actions in their totality. Gower, then, is an intermediary not just between audience and action, but between temporal and eternal perspectives:

I do beseech you
To learn of me, who stand [i' th'] gaps to teach you,
The stages of our story.  

(IV.iv.7-9)

III

Although people in the Middle Ages acknowledged God's mind to be a mystery, their characteristic rage for order allowed them to perceive hints of the divine order shaping human history. The biblical scheme of the Seven Ages, enormously popular throughout the medieval period, was based on an analogy between the days of creation, according to the Genesis narrative, and the ages of the world. It was first given full expression by Augustine, who at the close of The City of God refers to "the kingdom which has no end," thus associating the conclusion of his own text with the conclusion of earthly history. When he describes the eternal kingdom as following, in temporal sequence, the close of earthly history, he himself assumes the viewpoint of one outside time. Only from a timeless perspective could he perceive in human history six ages, the sixth of which "is now in progress," and after which "God will rest, as on the seventh day." The seventh age will be the great sabbath, whose "end will not be an evening, but the Lord's Day, an eighth eternal day."11

Slightly different versions of the scheme developed through the centuries.12 The popular Golden Legend outlined the ages thus:

The first is from Adam to Noah; the second from Noah to Abraham; the third from Abraham to Moses; the fourth from Moses unto David; the fifth from David to Jesu Christ. The sixth from Jesu Christ unto the end of the world. The seventh of the dying on earth. And the eighth of the general resurrection to heaven.13

Each age evolved its hero in the popular mind, a major figure who became the symbol for his entire era. A new age typically begins with a fresh
covenant between God and his people, an event that marks a significant manifestation of divine will in the course of human affairs and so alters the previous course of history. In the Middle Ages history was everywhere conceived in terms of the Seven Ages. Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, for instance, traces the history of incest through reference to the first three ages, those of Adam, Noah, and Abraham. (This reference occurs in the prologue to Book VIII, which contains the source story for *Pericles.* ) And the mystery cycles, England's preeminent drama for two centuries, shape the history of the human race according to two principles: biblical typology and the Seven Ages.

*Pericles,* of course, traces the lifetime of one man, not the human race, but the Renaissance posited intrinsic correspondences between the individual and the cosmos that made this structural appropriation natural. Indeed, Augustine himself had drawn the specific analogy between the growth from infancy of an individual and the developmental history of God's people." The Venerable Bede followed Augustine in relating the historical Ages to man's infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, senility, decrepit old age, and resurrection. The two sequences were brought together in the visual arts: a twelfth-century stained glass at Canterbury Cathedral shows the miracle at Cana bordered on one side by the six ages of man, and on the other side by the six ages of the world. Shakespeare had expressed the microcosmic form of the Seven Ages in Jaques' famous soliloquy in *As You Like It,* in which the ages of an individual's life are compared to seven acts of a play. Such plays did exist: "A Tragedy or Interlude manifesting the chief promises of God unto man by all ages in the old law" was published in 1538 and reissued in 1577. The Seven Ages scheme was not strictly a Catholic notion, for the author of this tragedy, John Bale, elsewhere wrote bitterly against the Roman church.

*Pericles* does not follow the seven ages of an individual's lifetime (infant, schoolboy, lover, etc.). Instead it incorporates the symbolic history of the human race into the history of one man—an innovative use of a familiar set of traditions. The play explores existence in time by epitomizing cosmic history in an individual lifetime. And the audience witnesses the interplay between Gower's extra-temporal vision and the more limited earthly vision of the hero himself. This assumption of a double time scheme is distinctly Boethian. Because *Pericles* insists on the interplay between microcosmic and macrocosmic levels, the hero's personal experience merges with, or recapitulates, biblical history. Considering an extended life history perhaps prompted the analogy with a pattern shaping all of human history.

The Seven Ages scheme exists as a skeleton beneath the play's action. Recognition of it should be considered a necessary prolegomenon to *Pericles.*
The existence of this shaping pattern does not mean that individual scenes are fundamentally more different in construction than they would be in a play with a more dynamic plot. Rather, the scheme's influence is felt in the distinctive pattern of theme and image found in the seven sequences. Recognition of the divisions themselves, which demands adoption of the Boethian perspective, is more important than recognition of the peculiar motif of any individual age, even though the two endeavors are clearly interdependent. (A useful comparison can be found in the shape of the mystery cycles: "No medieval cycle openly develops the theme [of the Seven Ages], and yet it has undoubtedly caused the Corpus Christi drama to find a distinctive protocycle core."¹⁷) The relevant parallels in Pericles tend to occur near the beginning of an episode, thus suggesting the identity of a particular age. Correspondences with some ages are closer than with others: the first section of Pericles carries unmistakable resonances of the Fall myth, but the fifth section corresponds only loosely with the age of David. (However, the fifth age was a trouble spot in schemes of the Seven Ages. David was usually considered symbolic of all the prophets. In one alternative version, the captivity in Babylon is the significant event of the fifth age, but the captivity produced no "hero" in the popular mind.) To an audience familiar with the Seven Ages scheme, however, the pattern would be established as soon as the first Eden-like episode was followed by an action emphasizing destructive sea and abiding faith. Why, then, have critics failed to notice the pattern before? For two reasons, I think: first, its poor text has deflected sustained critical attention from Pericles; and second, modern assumptions of a five-act structure have obscured this play's pattern of seven episodes.

IV

The significant action of the first age is of course the Fall. Pericles' first adventure in Antioch, like Adam's, involves the discovery of knowledge (deciphering the riddle) and the concomitant discovery of sin (recognizing Antiochus' incestuous relationship with his daughter).¹⁸ According to the law, the price for Pericles' misdeed—his discovery—is death. The Antioch episode is rich in imagery suggesting the Fall myth. Pericles speaks of "gods"

That have inflam'd desire in my breast  
To taste the fruit of yon celestial tree  
(Or die in th' adventure).

(1.i.20-23)
Antiochus refers to his daughter as “this fair Hesperides, / With golden fruit, but dangerous to be touch’d” (I.i.27-28). Later, Pericles calls both father and daughter “serpents” (I.i.132). Although Pericles does not himself partake of sin, the memory of what he has discovered seems to haunt him; after fleeing Antioch he is unable to shake “The sad companion, dull-eyed’d melancholy” (I.i.3). His subsequent flight from the threat of Antiochus’ vengeance echoes the wandering through the world of the fallen Adam. And while Pericles is not actually condemned to labor with sweat on his brow, he undergoes a sort of penance, “punish[ing] that before that he [Antiochus] would punish” (I.ii.33). Or as Helicanus explains to the Tyrian lords, Pericles,

doubting lest he had err’d or sinn’d,
To show his sorrow, he’d correct himself;
So puts himself unto the shipman’s toil,
With whom each minute threatens life or death.

(I.iii.21-24)

The hero’s shipwreck off the coast of Pentapolis, with the stage direction, “Enter Pericles, wet” (II.i.1), opens the play’s second age, corresponding to the age of Noah. Pericles, having been “Wash’d...from shore to shore” (II.i.6), has learned the lesson of mortality and he is, like Noah, obedient:

Wind, rain, and thunder, remember earthly man
Is but a substance that must yield to you;
And I (as fits my nature) do obey you.

(II.i.2-4)

The presence of the fishermen underlines the special importance of the sea in this age. Fishermen were frequently connected in biblical typology with Christ (“fisher of men”), so their presence here suggests the motif of redemption so central to the second age, the age of the near-destruction of the human race. (The earthy good humor of these fishermen is perhaps reminiscent of the stock comedy provided by Noah’s wife in the mystery cycles.) Like Noah after the flood, Pericles receives a promise of better fortune after enduring loss and destruction—the rusty armor drawn up by the fishermen enables him to compete for Thaisa’s hand. The armor itself seems symbolic of faith; Pericles’ description of it echoes the scriptural “armor of the Lord”: he quotes his father’s claim, “it hath been a shield / Twixt me and death” (II.i. 126-27).
The dumbshow at the beginning of Act III shows the court of Simonides receiving news that its “heir-apparent is a king!” (III.Ch.37). With Antiochus dead, Pericles may set out to reclaim his kingdom, which becomes a kind of promised land for the destitute wanderer: this is the third age, that of Abraham. Pericles boards ship with a pregnant wife; her role is Sarah’s, and in her the promise of generation is visually portrayed. Like Abraham, Pericles must be prepared to sacrifice a member of his family. He loses his wife instead of his child, but his words could be Abraham’s on the Mount of Vision when he says to the gods, “Why do you make us love your goodly gifts / And snatch them straight away?” (III.i.23–24). And Pericles exhibits a patriarchal faith when, bereft of his wife, he says,

We cannot but obey
The powers above us. Could I rage and roar
As doth the sea she lies in, yet the end
Must be as ’tis.

(III.iii.9–12)

The destruction of Antiochus and his daughter—“A fire from heaven came and shrivell’d up / Those bodies, even to loathing” (II.iv.9–10)—suggests the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah. The brimstone that rained on the two towns (Gen. 19:24) was equated with sulfur in Shakespeare’s time. This king and his daughter “so stunk” (II.iv.10) that their subjects refused to go near to bury them. Helicanus calls it “but justice” that “sin had his reward” (II.iv.13,15), and the sin is appropriately sexual. The report of Antiochus’ death appears in the second section of Pericles, not the third, which corresponds to Abraham’s age. Yet the report is distinctly background information, which may be provided almost anywhere (and given the tangled state of the existing text, a misplaced scene would not be surprising). Most relevant is the association between the place from which Pericles flees and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Attention shifts at the start of Act IV from Pericles to the now-grown Marina, illustrating well this play’s lack of causal connections between events. Nothing in the previous action (other than the repetition of misfortune) leads one to expect a plot against Marina’s life; and only a thematic concern with time dictates a dramatic jump over sixteen years. With this we might compare the conception of “time as artifact” that shapes the cycle plays, in Kolve’s analysis:

The progression from episode to episode in this drama is often without consecutive impulse. It is not built upon a theory of direct causation... The events chosen for dramatization are those in
which God intervenes in human history; significant time, it follows, becomes simply the point of intersection between these actions, the will of God expressed in time from outside time, by which a connection deeper than temporal causality is stated.\(^{21}\)

In *Pericles*, events are chosen for dramatization by Gower, the Chorus-presenter who is also the author, the creator, and hence the God of this secular drama. His choices manifest several basic medieval divisions of history, including that of the Three Laws—Natural Law, which governed the first three ages; Written Law, instituted by Moses and governing the fourth and fifth ages; and the Law Fulfilled, the law of charity ordained by Christ and governing the sixth and seventh ages.

The shift in focus to Marina with the fourth episode of *Pericles* corresponds to the institution of written law in the fourth age, the age of Moses. Marina herself represents a new code, a different way of dealing with the world. The age of Moses was represented in the cycle plays by both the presentation of the decalogue and the dramatization of exile; the latter is particularly relevant to Marina, whose existence in Tharsus and Mytilene amounts to an exodus. (Her first speech in the play concludes, “This world to me is as a lasting storm, / Whirring me from my friends” [IV.i.19-20].) Dionyza’s plot to kill Marina, who is perceived as a threat to the Tharsian princess, recalls Pharaoh’s slaughter of Hebrew children whom he saw as threatening. Captive in the brothel in Mytilene (where she is described as “a sojourner” [IV.ii.136]), Marina is servant to corrupt people and can rely only on her own faith, like Moses captive in Egypt.

Marina’s period of preaching in Mytilene corresponds to the age of the prophets. While not exactly a prophet herself, she establishes a reputation for surprising conversions, a reputation that damages the brothel’s business. She is described in semi-prophetic terms, as the following dialogue indicates:

\[
\begin{align*}
1.\text{Gent.}: & \text{Did you ever hear the like?} \\
2.\text{Gent.}: & \text{No, nor never shall do in such a place as this, she being once gone.} \\
1.\text{Gent.}: & \text{But to have divinity preach’d there! did you ever dream of such a thing?} \\
2.\text{Gent.}: & \text{No, no. Come, I am for no more bawdy-houses. Shall’s go hear the vestals sing?} \\
1.\text{Gent.}: & \text{I’ll do any thing now that is virtuous. . . .} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(IV.v.1-8)
Marina's powers of speech are emphasized throughout this episode, not only by the Bawd, who says "she would make a puritan of the devil" (IV.vi.9), but also by the Governor Lysimachus:

I did not think
Thou couldst have spoke so well, ne'er dreamt
thou couldst.
Had I brought hither a corrupted mind,
Thy speech had alter'd it.

(IV.vi.102-5)

Like Daniel in the lions' den, Marina in the brothel suffers a peculiar persecution, but remains steadfast.

The coming of Christ initiates the sixth age, which would, according to chroniclers, extend over the entire Christian era up to the end of earthly history. The Incarnation marks another important division in history—that between the first dispensation, the time of justice, and the second, the time of mercy. Clearly the course of Pericles' life is altered with the sixth episode; for the first time, grace is apparent in his fortunes. The memorable image of the sixth section of Pericles is the vision of Diana, a manifestation of divinity in the world of the play and "the single symbolic image that expresses the whole play," in the words of John Arthos. Having heard "[t]he music of the spheres" (V.i.228), Pericles is suddenly cast into "thick slumber" (V.i.234), and Diana reveals herself to him (and to the audience, in most productions). She directs him to her temple at Ephesus to make sacrifice and recite his story to the people there; clearly she directs him toward reunion with his lost wife. For the first time, the audience can perceive causal order in the events of the play; Pericles' history is being fulfilled, as human history was reaching fulfillment through Christ, according to religious historians. Diana wrests from the moribund Pericles a new promise of obedience; that is, they establish a new covenant. Marking a change in fortune, a coming of grace, for Pericles, the goddess's appearance functions analogously to Christ's alteration of the course of human history according to Christian doctrine. The vision is not an allegory of the Incarnation, although it images the descent of divine power into the world of the play and hence breaks the boundaries between ordinary experience and the miraculous, between the profane and the sacred. The vision reveals a shaping order in the course of Pericles' life, but in this secular play, reunion with daughter and wife count for far more than the divine vision.

Hence the end—both goal and conclusion—of earthly history, the seventh age, Augustine's "great sabbath," is represented by the reunion of Pericles, Marina, and Thaisa in the temple of Diana. The scene is set apart from the rest of the play by its hushed tone of mystery. This reunion is more
than Pericles could ever have hoped for, and the action is of a different magnitude from the previous adventures. So the seventh age, marking the beginning of eternity, stands against the preceding six ages of earthly time. Augustine calls it the age "of the dying on earth." At Ephesus, Pericles and Thaisa have not actually died and risen blessed, but the motif of death and resurrection pervades the scene:

Did you not name a tempest,  
A birth, and death?  
(V.iii.33-34)

The voice of dead Thaisa!  
(V.iii.34)

O, come, be buried  
A second time within these arms.  
(V.iii.43-44)

And an audience's understanding of this reunion must include the memories of Thaisa entombed and cast overboard, of Pericles comatose until touched by Marina. Pericles and Thaisa have undergone years of suffering, for no crime but that of being mortal, and now are reborn to a redeemed experience of life that gives as well as takes away. The magnitude of Pericles' and Thaisa's sufferings makes them seem to represent something larger than themselves. The curious sequence of events in their story becomes a significant structure when they are viewed as figures who enact the destiny of the whole human race.

The seven episodes of *Pericles* in a sense recapitulate one another, for each follows a basic pattern in which Pericles or Marina faces some sort of trial and either endures or receives a reprieve. The Seven Ages of History also repeat a basic action: significant to each age is the reestablishment of a covenant between God and man. This pattern is clearly seen in Bale's *God's Promises*, where the seven acts correspond to the seven ages, each beginning with a lament by God the Father over mankind's sinful state, and each culminating with a new covenant. A covenant, a promise, is something that may be fulfilled only in the future, and so the structure of the Seven Ages provides a forward-moving view of history. Medieval historians were compelled to place their own lives in the sixth age, thus merging history—the report of a known past—with a transcendent vision of the future provided by faith. *Pericles* also adopts this eschatological approach to history by incorporating the Boethian idea of double time into the play's structure. Shakespeare traces the hero's road to the eventual discovery that meaning and promise informed his life from the start, and
juxtaposes Gower's timeless perspective on that life. Gower knows, and Pericles learns, that through the consideration of ultimate ends a man achieves that transcendence of himself whereby his life ceases to be a linear sequence of unconnected events and becomes instead a significant conflict leading to redemption.

V

Thematically as well as structurally, ideas of time and eternity dominate *Pericles*. Since Gower alone has knowledge of time's outcome—the perspective of eternity—the other characters are much concerned with the qualities required to deal with temporal existence. Temporal existence here, as in *King Lear*, means tragic existence, and patience is crucial in both plays: Lear, on the edge of madness, pleads, "You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" (*King Lear*, II.iv.271). Both Lychorida and Helicanus entreat Pericles to have patience, and evidently he holds that virtue in great esteem, for the highest compliment he can pay to Marina in the moment of their reunion is to evoke the emblem of "Patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling / Extremity out of act" (*Pericles*, V.i.137–39). Echoing *Twelfth Night*’s "Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief" (*Twelfth Night*, II.iv.114–15), the line suggests an emblem such as Ripa’s Patienza, who smiles and sits on a block that resembles a tomb. J. P. Brocket points out the image's particularly "disquieting" power here, since “Pericles looks almost literally like one rising from the grave.” Knight attributes to Patience the power to transcend tragedy:

The whole world of great tragedy ("kings' graves") is subdued to an over-watching figure, like Cordelia’s love by the bedside of Lear’s sleep. "Extremity," that is disaster in all its finality (with perhaps a further suggestion of endless time) is therefore negated, put out of action, by a serene assurance corresponding to St. Paul’s certainty in "O death, where is thy sting?" Patience is here an all-enduring calm seeing through tragedy to the end; smiling through endless death to ever-living eternity.

Knight implies something more by patience than mere stoic endurance. His definition suggests a future orientation, like St. Paul’s "ye have neede of pacience, that after ye have done the wil of God, ye might receive the promes." Patience in this sense is an expression of hope, which renders the future—be it “ever-living eternity,” “the promes,” or reunion with a lost
child—available now, in the present, as it were on loan from the future. By providing a means to endure present suffering, hope can be a life-giving doctrine. And hope must precede the kind of Christian patience Knight refers to, for hope’s forward-looking orientation allows transcendence of the present moment and thus an escape from the relentless linearity of historical time.

Complementary to the emblem of Patience in Pericles is one of hope. In the tournament scene, the six various knights present their devices. Sources or analogues have been discovered in contemporary emblem books for each device but that of Pericles:

his present is
A withered branch, that’s only green at top;
The motto: “In hac spe vivo.”

(II.i.42-44)

It has been suggested that Pericles offers an actual withered branch rather than a painted device. The motto, “in this hope I live,” labels the power of faith at work in the scene: Pericles, “the mean knight,” competes in rusty armor salvaged from a wreck, and wins.

The emblems of patience and hope stand in conjunction, indicating two poles of the faithful man’s attitude toward life. In a world where meanings are mysterious, one requires patience to endure the battery of sufferings and to hope that his misfortunes will not prove finally senseless. The complementarity in the play of patience and hope, peculiarly time-oriented virtues, accords with the Boethian idea of double time: man is tied to the earthly vision of limits and chronicity but is promised a glimpse of salvific time.

The timeless perspective in Pericles afforded by Gower as Chorus and by the structural embodiment of a microcosmic human history together suggest that a dual vision is required to judge the play. From the earthly perspective of tragedy, the hero is a victim of fortune, a fool of time. This vision is entirely legitimate: Pericles’ despair and suffering may remain more accessible to the audience than the joy and wonder of the reunion scenes. But at the play’s end we are allowed access to Gower’s timeless perspective also. When we view Pericles’ life in its totality, order appears in a mad universe, pattern replaces parataxis, cycles of time replace crises.

The commonly voiced complaint that Pericles is uneven in dramatic intensity is justified. While several scenes in the play, especially the reunion of Pericles and Marina, resonate with beauty and suggestive power approaching that of King Lear, the play exhibits no sustained immediacy, and the response to this has been one of disappointment. It is time to realize that the structure of Pericles, obscured by the editorial assumption of five dramatic
acts, suggests a reason and purpose for the play’s rebuffing of sympathy. The Seven Ages pattern and the eternal perspective of Gower both work to pull the audience back from the action, away from sympathetic reach with the characters. Shakespeare, having explored in the great tragedies the disastrous attempts of individuals to order human life, recoiled from this sensibility in the last plays. The duality of time contemplated in Pericles and illustrated in its incorporation of the Seven Ages pattern signals an approach to the problem of human suffering that derived largely from a medieval perspective.\textsuperscript{29} 

NOTES


4. In the Introduction of his New Arden Edition of the play, Hoeniger considers it “highly doubtful whether Pericles was planned... as a five-act drama” and conjectures that it was instead “intended either as a play in two parts”—noting that it was staged thus at Whitehall in 1619, with a refreshment break in the middle—or as “seven tableaux or acts, each separated by a chorus” (liii, lxvi).

5. Richard Hillman (“Shakespeare’s Gower and Gower’s Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of Pericles,” Shakespeare Quarterly 36 [1985]: 427) notes the attention paid recently to “the issue of mediation: does the Chorus create alienation or engagement, and exactly how?”


7. “[A] structural approach especially suits this work, particularly since it may be applied independently of textual issues,” writes Phyllis Gorlase (“Puzzle and Artifice: The Riddle as Metapoetry in ‘Pericles,’” Shakespeare Survey 29 [1976]: 11). But while
“a number of structural studies,” including Gorfain’s have addressed “the meaning of its rambling form,” no one has, to my knowledge, recognized the important analogy with the Seven Ages.

8. All quotations from Shakespeare refer to The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. B. Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton, 1974).


12. V. A. Kolve lists some of the more important recitations of the scheme in The Play Called Corpus Christi (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966) 90.


18. Felperin notes an allusion to “the myth of Eden and the fall into knowledge,” “Shakespeare’s Miracle Play” 366; Richard Hillman mentions Pericles’ “naive use of the symbolism of the Fall,” “The Tempest as Romance and Anti-Romance,” University of Toronto Quarterly 55.2 (1985–86) 150.


20. OED 1.


22. Kolve illustrates the relationship between several medieval divisions of history that influence the structure of the Corpus Christi cycles (120).


24. Knight calls it a “breaking of those boundaries” separating heavenly harmony from earthly decay (67).


28. Knight 47.

29. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Conference on Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies, September 1985, Villanova, PA.