

*Tikrit University*  
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*Higher Studies/ M.A./ English Literature*

**Drama**

*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*

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## *Pericles*

Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, is a late romance that blends adventure, tragedy, and redemption. It explores themes of fortune, divine providence, family reunion, and the endurance of virtue amidst suffering.

### Style and Structure

1-Episodic, with **romance motifs** (journeys, separations, miraculous reunions).

2-Use of **chorus (John Gower)** to frame the narrative, linking medieval storytelling with Renaissance drama.

3-Shifts in tone: tragic suffering in early acts, miraculous restoration in later acts.

In *Pericles*, dumb shows are used by the character Gower, who acts as a narrator, to visually summarize and comment on key plot points that are difficult to portray through dialogue alone. These silent mimes illustrate events such as Pericles' shipwreck, the receiving of a crucial letter, and the false impression of his daughter Marina's death. The dumb shows allow Gower to use a more traditional theatrical technique to bridge time gaps, convey complex actions, and provide a visual, non-verbal layer of meaning for the audience.

The dumb shows are used for the following reasons:

**1-To bridge narrative gaps:** Gower uses dumb shows to quickly convey a sequence of events, such as showing Pericles setting sail, being shipwrecked, and being the sole survivor, all before continuing with the main action.

**2-To summarize and comment on action:** A dumb show in Act 4 shows a grieving Pericles, accompanied by Cleon and Dionyza, going to Marina's tomb, which visually reinforces the story of her supposed death.

**3-To illustrate complex situations:** The dumb show that illustrates Pericles receiving a letter from Helicanus shows how Gower is able to depict the transfer of information and the immediate, dramatic consequences of that information without relying on extended dialogue.

The character of John Gower serves as the chorus, a device Shakespeare used to guide the audience through the narrative, explain plot points, and provide moral commentary. Speaking in archaic, rhyming verse, Gower introduces the story, fills in gaps, and even directs "dumb shows" (pantomimed sequences) to convey actions that are difficult to stage. His role gives the play an antique, medieval feel, connecting it to the medieval poet of the same name.

## **Functions of Gower as chorus:**

**1-Narrative guide:** Gower introduces the story at the beginning and bridges scenes, summarizing events and characters' fates across vast time and distance.

**2-Plot explanation:** He clarifies events that happen offstage or are not fully shown, such as Pericles's return to Tyre or the circumstances of Thaisa's death at sea.

**3-Direct audience address:** Gower speaks directly to the audience, sometimes telling them to "be quiet" to watch a scene or a dumb show, and often providing commentary on the characters' actions and the play's moral themes.

**4-Structural element:** He provides the play with a clear narrative structure, acting as the storyteller who shapes the dramatic experience for the audience.

**5-Thematic reinforcement:** Through his monologues, Gower draws attention to the play's key themes, like the dangers of incest and the capriciousness of fortune.

**6-Archaic tone:** His language and persona, an ancient storyteller, give the play a sense of antiquity and a unique, stylized tone that distances the audience from the main action.

**The Riddle:** Pericles reads the riddle, which contains clues such as "I mother, wife, and yet his child". He immediately understands the meaning: the King is in a secret, sinful, and illegal sexual relationship with his own daughter.

## **Important Notes:**

1-*Pericles* is not purely Shakespearean, but its later acts bear his signature themes of reconciliation and transcendence.

2-It exemplifies the romance genre, where suffering leads to renewal.

3-The play's episodic structure mirrors the unpredictability of fortune.

4-Marina's virtue and Pericles's endurance highlight the triumph of morality over corruption.

5-The sea functions as a metaphor for life's instability and divine intervention.