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Marina's Classical Woman:

Gallant Appearance, Speech, Truth, and Masculine Endurance
in William Shakespeare's *Pericles*

Traditionally, a classic hero in literature is often thought to be a male character.

Characters like Esperanza in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Janie in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are not often considered for their journeys and how they are heroes in their own right. An even lesser known female character in Shakespeare's *Pericles* also deserves greater attention for her heroism than she has been given. People might see Pericles himself as the character worthy of the hero title, but closer examination shows that Marina, his daughter, is the true hero of the play.

Lysimachus, the governor of Mytilene, has visited Marina during her time living in a brothel. When he meets Pericles, who has not spoken in three months, Lysimachus offers to bring in someone who he knows will be successful in urging Pericles to talk. He sends for Marina because of some of her good and useful attributes that he feels will help Pericles talk once again. However, while Lysimachus intends for Marina to help Pericles with her speech and possibly her appearance, she helps him by relating her suffering and how she is exactly like him in the trials of her life. One might believe that it is solely Marina's goodness and purity that strike something in Pericles to make him interested in listening to her at all, but many lines of the play reveal that there is more to how Pericles initially views Marina. His diction helps the audience realize that he carries stereotypes about woman, but then later on he relates, "of my

endurance, thou art a man, and I / Have suffered like a girl” (5.1.139-40). Thus, Marina must first appear and speak like a woman, but she must also have the endurance of a man in order to save her father.

Pericles and Lysimachus initially speak about and to Marina with traditional feelings toward women governing their actions. When Lysimachus describes Marina, he begins with “She is such a one that” (5.1.70). In proper English, humans are referred to with the words such as “who” and “whom,” whereas animals or inanimate objects are paired with “that” or “which” (e.g., the animal that has black fur in relation to the lady who has black hair). Pericles also commits this grammatical flaw when he first begins to speak coherently. He first sees Marina, is astonished by her appearance, and gasps, “You’re like something that...” (5.1.105). At the time that the play was first viewed, the audience may not have thought about this twice because of the current opinion regarding women; i.e., women were thought of as nothing higher than animals or inanimate objects, so the use of such words toward them would have been appropriate.

As is customary in interactions between men and women, Pericles marvels at Marina’s appearance by comparing his wife and Marina by saying, “Her stature to an inch; as wandlike straight; / As silver-voiced; her eyes as jewel-like / And cased as richly; in pace another Juno; / Who starves the ears she feeds, and makes them hungry / The more she gives them speech” (5.1.112-16). During this description, Pericles analyzes Marina’s appearance by using such classically feminine phrases as “wandlike,” “silver-voiced,” and “jewel-like.” As well, Pericles compares Marina to Juno, who was the Roman goddess of heaven and known as the protector of woman and marriage. When the connection to Juno arises, there is specific reference to speech and how Marina “starves the ears she feeds, and makes them hungry / The more she gives them

speech” (5.1.115-16). Thus, the men in this scene look at Marina in regards to words and not actions, which is often considered a masculine trait.

Pericles’s description at these lines is not the only time when characters describe Marina using words that are normally thought to be strictly feminine. Lysimachus describes Marina as being “all happy as the fairest of all” when he first suggests that Marina might be able to make Pericles speak (5.1.50). Slightly over thirty lines later, the same character directly refers to Marina’s gift with speech, and Marina, slightly before this, states that she has an “utmost skill” that she will use on Pericles (5.1.79). Four lines later, Marina refers to the concept of women being seen and not heard by relating how she has been “gazed on” (5.1.88). Even later in the scene, Pericles uses words such as “modest” and “Truth” when he says that Marina cannot lie, another characteristic commonly thought of women (5.1.124-25). One of the last feminine phrases of note in this scene is when Pericles asks Marina if she is a fairy (5.1.158). The interesting part about this question is that he does not ask if Marina is a ghost, as one might have done to a man, but instead he asks her if she is a fairy – hardly a symbol of masculinity or anything other than dainty femininity.

However, even though various characters use such words throughout the entire scene, Marina’s true power lies in her ability to have endured as much as her father. While she does speak, which is the primary quality for which she is summoned, the audience must place attention on what she speaks about and how her father receives this information. She makes the observation that she was not born of “any shores,” which is an observation that perhaps only an experienced seaman would have made (5.1.106). As well, Marina could even be perceived as wielding some degree of power over her father since she threatens him with, “Patience, good sir,

or here I'll cease" when he grieves that he is being mocked by listening to a woman named Marina (5.1.146-49).

The one word that pierces through the uniform phrases describing Marina is on line 69. When Marina enters the scene, Lysimachus comments, "Oh, here's the lady that I sent for. — / Welcome, fair one! — Is't not a goodly presence?" (5.1.67-8). Helicanus agrees, "She's a gallant lady" (5.1.69). While there is the error of "that" in place of "whom," the attention must also go toward the use of the word "gallant." The note for line 69 in this edition of the text relates that gallant is used in this line to mean "splendid." Upon initial inspection, the word seems to fit Marina's character. However, the word has masculine connotations that keep this word from being a good adjective for Marina's character as we know her thus far.

The Oxford English Dictionary has several definitions that are worthy of inspection when looking at this particular line. One of the first definitions states that gallant can mean "gorgeous or showy in appearance; finely dressed; smart." However, there are other definitions that make this word more masculine such as "chivalrously brave; full of noble bearing" and "conventional epithet of a military or naval officer." Thus, Marina, even upon her entrance into the scene, can be interpreted as a character who is "as strong as a man." Pericles seems to agree with this later in the scene. He states that even if she "prove the thousand part / Of my endurance, thou art a man, and I / Have suffered like a girl" (5.1.138-40). Since Pericles accepts Marina's story, he also accepts what he proclaimed; i.e., Marina is masculine in her endurance.

In Act 5, Scene 1, Marina's awakening of her father does more than just reunite a father with his feminine daughter and then move the play along. Instead, this scene and the awakening that occurs in it demonstrate complexity in a character who would otherwise seem nothing more than the daughter of the main character. Instead, Marina rises to her father's level in order to be

able to save him. If she was, in fact, a gently-bred female, she would not have been able to tell her story to Pericles as she did. The audience, after all, must remember that her telling did include threatening her father into a momentary silence for her to speak. Without the will to speak, Pericles would not have had the same encounter with Thaisa, his wife whom he thought was dead but then finds to be very much alive and well. Pericles, Thasia, and their daughter Marina would not have been reunited in such a harmonious way without Marina's intervention. Shakespeare's *Pericles* (specifically Act 5, Scene 1) is not about Pericles reawakening but rather of the audience, Pericles, and the other characters in the play awakening to Marina's full character, her heroism, and what she is capable of achieving.

Works Cited

"Gallant." Oxford English Dictionary. Online ed. 2006.

Shakespeare, William. "Pericles." Shakespeare's Romances and Poems. Ed. David Bevington. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. 1469-72.