

# Rivers of Story: Some Filmic Afterlives of *Pericles*

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## Abstract

Some stories are like rivers, just as rivers hold their own stories. This essay considers origins and movie adaptations of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, tracking them into territory where the source play is one staging place for a longer narrative history, and the film need not acknowledge or show awareness of the play. Texts include the French movie, *Paris nous appartient* or *Paris Belongs to Us* (1961), the American *A Love Song for Bobby Long* (2004), and the Australian Aboriginal musical film *Bran Nue Dae* (2009).

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## Shakespearean Romance and Film Genres

Rivers have always fascinated me. I have traced several to their sources, and two in particular. The Tyne presented a dilemma since it has two points of origin, respectively north on the picturesque border between Scotland and Northumberland on private land feeding into the man-made Kielder Dam, and south on the rather bleak Alston Moor in Cumbria, marked by ghost towns where tin mines have collapsed and been abandoned. The confluence comes at a "meeting of the waters" near Hexham, and then flows down along the Tyne Valley past Corbridge, through Newcastle upon Tyne, and into the sea at Tynemouth. Even the names document the landscape and have created numerous communities along the river, providing sustenance of food and water, transport, and recreation. I chose the southern source and eventually came to nothing resembling a spectacular snow-clad mountain peak or even a bubbling spring, but rather a damp patch which began in soggy stasis and gradually moved away at a sluggish pace to find its path.

Meanwhile, the Swan River in Western Australia is an impressive but unsung waterway, at times stately and broad, albeit invisibly polluted, flowing eventually down to the Indian Ocean at Fremantle Harbour. It is not the result of a confluence, but in some ways, it contains three rivers, beginning as the Avon which becomes the Swan (the Shakespearean echoes are no doubt more than coincidental) and generating a major tributary, the Canning. My pilgrimage in this case led me to a place called Wickepin where, according to aboriginal Nyoongar legend, resided the usually benign but also dangerous and powerful Waugal, Rainbow Serpent in the Dreamtime of creation myths, his

excrement being the ubiquitous limestone all the way to the ocean (Hughes-Hallett 1997, 297). A little more promising than the Tyne's provenance, its source turned out to be a gently running spring at a spot which, in an interesting reversal of European categories of upstream and downstream, past and future, beginning and endings, Aborigines knew as "where the fresh water ran out."

Like the Tyne, for countless centuries (in this case probably 60,000 years) the more recently named Swan has provided life and livelihoods for generations living along its course, and it has also been dammed, diverted, filled in, forced underground, and generally manipulated for human purposes. However, while the Tyne is valued largely in terms of economic and practical considerations, the original inhabitants and custodians of the land now known as Australia, with their beliefs in the natural law of the land or "country," regarded the Swan as a spiritual and emotional resource with its sacred spots and significant areas created or inhabited by benign and malevolent spirits. Names along its course tell as much: "the place of magic spirits" (now depressingly a freeway), "place of the children," "place of death water," "the blackness of the river bank" — and sometimes indicating the kind of landscape or food to be found there (Broomhall 2012). The Swan River provides a rich, classic case of what we now call "emotional geographies."

My premise is that some stories are like rivers, just as rivers hold their own stories. Obvious examples abound. The story of Ulysses' journeying no doubt predates Homer's *Odyssey*, includes Tennyson's poetry, and runs beyond James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The equivalent of its geographical journeying around the Mediterranean is also a temporal history marked by constant adaptation to human needs at different times. Sometimes parts or episodes of stories are like coves that can be "settled" — the widow Dido from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the transformation of characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The analogy of the history of narratives likened to rivers has a parallel with the ocean in an article by Peter Womack, "Shakespeare and the Sea of Stories," pointing to a "narrative reservoir for poets and playwrights alike" though his account is developed in different ways from the one offered here (Womack 1999, 170). In terms of *Pericles*, Womack gives an example of the way an older miracle play with a Catholic tradition (*Mary Magdalene*) contains a set of comparable narrative incidents that Shakespeare adapted into a Protestant worldview more skeptical of miracles. Lisa Hopkins has more eloquently used the same metaphor of the sea in her critical account of the play:

In *Pericles*, the true borders and the true journeys are those of the mind, and for all the imagery of the sea, the most important shores are those that lap at the self — those that Pericles himself memorably terms "the shores of my mortality." (Hopkins 2000, 228-29)

My approach here, as well as focusing not on possible sources but on works influenced by *Pericles*, also draws on early modern humanist, literary and rhetorical practice. Another related but different account is given by Lori Humphrey Newcombe in a chapter called "The Sources of Romance, the Generation of Story, and the Patterns of Pericles Tales" (Newcombe 2009, 21-46). Once again, however, the aim is different from mine. Like Womack, Newcombe's study is exclusively focused on the relationship between Shakespeare's immediate sources (essentially *novella*, Wilkins' *Painfull Adventures of Pericles*, Twyne's *Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, and more distantly Gower's *Confessio Amantis*) and his play, rather than later adaptations which take Shakespeare's *Pericles* itself as either source or generic analogue, which is my task here. Also, Newcombe's main concern is to establish an argument drawing on feminist scholarship, proposing that attitudes to sources are a matter of gender and subject to "patrilinear logic" and "familial agenda": "Source study assumes a gendered, generational, and textual norm: it traces single, fixed lines of descent from a feminized source via the presumed paternity of Shakespeare's genius to the legitimate inheritance of a play," the latter being presumed "masculine" and given priority (Newcombe 2009, 23). Her aim is to erect a theory of "the sexual politics of romance intertextuality" (Newcombe 2009, 35), acknowledging a related idea advanced by Janet Adelman, which deals less with textual and source matters and more with a perception that in Shakespeare's *Pericles* the female body is seen as a threat to masculine authority and needs to be excised or subdued: "What is celebrated, then, is the recuperation of the family, freed from the sexual body" (Adelman 2000, 187). This approach is not my concern here, and in fact I will be implicitly turning the argument on its head somewhat by treating Shakespeare's *Pericles* as the dimly perceived (maternal and feminine?) source for recent movies, none of which can be regarded as being especially masculinized or prioritized. My concentration is on genre and literary imitation. However, Newcombe's conclusion in exploring the sources for Shakespeare's play closely anticipates and mirrors my exploration of the *Pericles* story's sometimes unconscious and surprising "descendants":

The set of *Pericles* tales did not ask early modern audiences to impose textual lineages, to claim textual patrimonies, to isolate single sources or master authors. It called on early modern audiences to listen carefully for patterns of repetitions and difference, to "stand i'th'gaps" and teach themselves "the stages of our story" (4.4.8-9). It invited audiences to draw on romances' resources to travel an expanding sea of narrative meaning. (Newcombe 2009, 41)

The doctrine of composition in rhetoric involving Imitation and Invention, followed by early modern imaginative writers, seems to embody some such analogy as the ever-flowing, ever-changing courses of rivers of narrative which I have invoked. The confluences of literary tradition might not relate to a specific narrative but to a genre, such as Elegy, Ode, Sonnet or Epic; or to the style of a writer so distinctive as to be recognizable, like Horace or Martial. Elizabethans such as Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson and the rest found it not only convenient but obligatory to adopt such models of authority as their own source or origin, while at the same time recognising that they must not produce a mere copy but an adaptation, a personal point of utility or Invention in the bend of the river where they chose to build their own habitation. The particular chosen river may have originated with the classics, but like Heraclitus, each writer knew that they never step into the same river twice, since it is "made new" each time they placed their own feet in its waters, depending on what they found stimulating to their own artistic purposes and creative temperaments. Petrarch in a letter to Boccaccio described Imitation in terms of human generations and genetics, "the resemblance of a son to his father" (Jones 1977, 19). Although the child is not a clone of parents, yet that child's unique physiognomy would not exist without those particular parents, and something similar could be claimed for settlements along the Tyne or the Swan — they exist simply because the river does, but they can also utilize the tradition with their own inventive powers.

Drawing a little closer to the subject of this paper, we find also that in some cases the parenting river is acknowledged and known to the writer — the two springs on Mount Helicon where the Muses dwelt and the story of Narcissus originated — while at other times the source is more immediate than mediate, a tributary rather than the river itself, as Shakespeare imitates his contemporary Marlowe who is in turn imitating the classics. In the case of Shakespeare especially, and certainly in the example to be explored here, his particular imitations have become so culturally powerful that they become the river itself for those who come later. His versions of Antony and Cleopatra are more "real" to us than Plutarch's upon which he based his depictions, and for us they are origins in their own right, generating our own received narratives. Imitations may not even be known let alone acknowledged by name, but their presences, barely visible and sometimes flowing underground, are signs of the river still acting as a cultural reference point, even if unobserved. It is with Shakespeare's *Pericles* as the *fons et origo* that this essay on origins and adaptations begins, rather than ends. It will become obvious that the concept of Shakespearean adaptation advanced here goes well beyond "plays turned into films" and "offshoots," into territory where the source play is one staging place (the theatrical metaphor is relevant here) within a longer narrative history, and the film need not acknowledge or show explicit awareness of the play.

Shakespeare makes it very clear he is conscious of adapting a very old story in writing (or more likely collaborating in writing) *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, through the opening Chorus figure, Gower:<sup>1</sup>

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.  
 It hath been sung at festivals,  
 On ember-eves and holy-ales;  
 And lords and ladies in their lives  
 Have read it for restoratives:  
 The purchase is to make men glorious,  
*Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.* (1. Chorus. 1-10)

The Latin means "the older a good thing is the better it is." In this case the models do not come from standard classical genres but from romance, potentially endless stories involving travel, separations and reunions, conflict and reconciliation, loss and recovery, fathers, mothers and daughters, and re-integration of disintegrated families. These date from late classical Greek times and continue through the medieval period. In the case of *Pericles*, the story otherwise known as Apollonius of Tyre, it had been adapted in different versions from fifth-century origins (Cooper 2004, 266). We may now turn to some modern movies where, at least arguably, we find the romance elements in their distinctive *Pericles* version replicated. Each example, I suggest, draws on particular clusters of themes intimately tied to the romance story of *Pericles*, and in turn illuminates the play.

### Episodic Storytelling, the Guileless Heroine, and Politics

The most intriguing choice made by Jacques Rivette in his challenging New Wave movie, *Paris nous appartient* or *Paris Belongs to Us* (1961) is to make its central pretext the preparations for an ill-starred, amateur production of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. No matter how dedicated and even obsessed is its director, Gerard Lenz, and despite many rehearsals, the enterprise seems doomed. Each rehearsal is held in a different setting because they can find no reliable venue, and they are always disrupted by acrimony or circumstances, leading to a steady leaking of the main actors, who find excuses to resign. By the end, Gerard manages to get "corporate sponsorship" for thirty performances from a major theatre, *Le Théâtre du Cité*, only to find that in doing so he loses all artistic control and his most loyal actors to decisions made by entrepreneurial philistines intent on

profits. In despair, Gerard resigns and later commits suicide. There is also a major mystery running alongside this plot. The composer Juan, whom Gerard had asked to provide all-important music for the production of *Pericles*, has died, presumed either to have committed suicide or been murdered.

The search for reasons, and for the missing tape of his score, provides the core of mystery and the main intrigue of the plot. The only person genuinely moved to investigate is a young woman, Anne, who is a student of literature. Her opening scene shows her reading the song from *The Tempest* ending in ". . . Those are pearls that were his eyes, / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange." Prophetically, the words come to mirror Juan's posthumous fate. When he loses his female lead, Gerard casts Anne as his Marina though she has no acting training or ability. Anne's increasingly fraught efforts to avert what she believes is a plot endangering Gerard's life bring her into contact with a motley group. Philip is an illegal immigrant fleeing from McCarthyite America, paranoid (for good reason, since he is sought by officials) and perhaps schizophrenic. Terry, a darkly secretive *femme fatale*, "drifts between Paris and New York" and had been involved with Juan and Gerard. There is also a sinister businessman named de George. By the end, we discover that the dark forces are a ruthless political group, the *Falange*, a French infiltration of the right-wing Spanish movement espoused by Franco. Critics of the film, mainly French theorists, tend to downplay the *Pericles* thread as distracting and almost irrelevant, an example of what one character describes derisively as "entertainment for intellectuals" in comparison with the realities of political violence. But its presence is a real question, and may be a central one — why is a little-known English play by Shakespeare so prominent in a defiantly experimental film made by Rivette, who was himself a theory-driven critic for *Cahiers du Cinéma* rather than a professional director, and why is that play *Pericles* in particular?

One obvious explanation is the common theme of exile. Even apart from Philip, each of the characters is in some way haunted by a sense of social discomfort and deracination, some feeling that they are at the mercy of conspiratorial forces beyond their ken, as though Paris does not in fact belong to them. Even Anne, the most "local" and ordinary Parisienne, feels increasingly bewildered and frightened, while Gerard never has control over his play or his life. The group is described as "an order of exiles." Such unease, confusion, and near-paranoia are the ambient moods of the film. *Pericles* in Shakespeare's play is, if nothing else, a hapless and helpless exile, driven from one court in fear of his life into a life of wandering by sea, just as the theatre group has to keep finding a new venue. Anne, like Shakespeare's Marina in the brothel, preserves her moral integrity only through her innocence and refusal to compromise her own version of truth. She has

in abundance the perseverance and patience exhibited by the women in Shakespearean romance, including *Pericles*.

Moreover, the form of Shakespeare's play is consciously referred to and reflected in the film's structure. Gerard is defined as a Brechtian director, at one stage telling his actors not to identify with their role but to remember they are actors and that theatre is "not illusion" but a reality in its own right. He and Anne speak of *Pericles* in terms of Brecht's epic theatre, which in turn was based on that playwright's reading of Shakespeare:

ANNE [*Pericles* is] rather disconnected, but that doesn't matter.

GERARD Why?

ANNE Because it's on another level . . . Is that the right answer?

GERARD Full marks. Everyone says I'm crazy . . . but the reason I want to stage it is because it's "unplayable." It's shreds and patches, yet it hangs together over all. *Pericles* may traverse kingdoms . . . the heroes are dispersed, yet can't escape, they're all reunited in Act V. I want to show that. Do you think I'm crazy?

ANNE Not at all.

GERARD Thanks, but we must make people understand it. It shows a chaotic but not absurd world, rather like our own, flying off in all directions, but with a purpose. Only we don't know what.

ANNE I agree: the world is less absurd than it seems. But what can we do to show it clearly?

GERARD I'm counting on the music.

The world depicted in *Paris nous appartient* resembles *Pericles* as described by Anne and Gerard, and the way the film is structured mirrors the play's episodic "wandering" and the "shreds and patches" of partial revelation of some "purpose" behind the apparently absurd and disconnected events. Music is important at certain heightened moments in *Pericles*, such as when he alone hears "the music of the spheres" (5.1.220), and it adds an overall, unifying ambience (Knight 1948, 55-57). And just as Gerard hopes to recover the lost music for his production, so the music in the film itself centrally contributes to mood and meaning, since it is at times strikingly discordant, ominous and alarming, even while there is an illusion of inconsequentiality.

The hidden "purpose" behind the movie's mysteries is revealed at the end, and once again it is the fate of the play-within-film which is part of the explanation. The significance of the suicides of Juan, and later Gerard, lies in the fact that they are artists trying to maintain their integrity in a world that menacingly threatens their values. Gerard loses everything he has worked for in his play

when it comes under bureaucratic control and is viewed simply as a profit-making commodity. The specific "conspiracy" against art is named as the Falange, a "dictatorship syndicalism" which had come stealthily from Franco's Spain into France in 1955 (the film is set in 1957) and is referred to in the film. This authoritarian ideology, among other things, condemned artistic individualism in the name of nationalism and social cohesiveness, and instead encouraged the kind of cultural "syndicalism" which is the fate of Gerard's production of *Pericles* and is expected by Rivette as the fate of his *auteur* movie. The ending seems obscure to us now because the Falange movement is no longer remembered, but in a strange way the film is prophetic of our own times in which art is more insidiously driven through the need for sponsorship by capitalist forces in industry and business, rather than by personal vision. Ours is a world of non-freedom which Rivette might recognise if he had lived to see it, and it might make him feel vindicated in the pessimism and futility which, ultimately, he saw as part of the *Pericles* vision. In picking up this dark strain in Shakespeare's play, which can indeed be detected when we consider the fortunes of its unfree, hapless hero, Rivette chooses not to end with the Elizabethan play's final reconciliations and fulfilment. For these we can turn to our other films.

### Love, Loss, Restoration

Inspiration for this section of my paper came unexpectedly while I was watching on television the American film *A Love Song for Bobby Long* (2004). It gradually dawned that I was on somehow familiar, literary territory. First of all, in filmic terms it seemed influenced by a "Shakespeare movie," *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), which in turn was itself explicitly based on Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays. It is also a film with many literary associations. It was adapted from a semi-autobiographical novel, *Off Magazine Street* by Ronald Everett Capps (2004), which the author says is designed to show that "goodness can occur far from conventional morality, and beautiful things can look ugly at first glance" — coincidentally a good description of some episodes in *Pericles*, such as Thaisa's death in childbirth in a storm at sea, and Marina's virtue, which has the power of converting bawds and pimps in a brothel. Furthermore, like the novel, the film is full of literary references, building up a tissue of intertextuality leading into the realm of reasserted literary "origins." *Pericles* may not itself be referenced, but the general ethos of the film invites some compelling comparisons.

John Travolta as Bobby Long is an ageing and gone-to-seed, retired (perhaps sacked?) English professor. He lives in a state of amiably decrepit resignation, an alcoholic haze and encroaching illnesses, with his former star student, Lawson Pines, who aims to write a biography of the Professor but struggles unsuccessfully against writer's block (and no wonder, given the amount of vodka



they both drink). An eighteen-year-old woman called Purslane (Pursy) Will, played by Scarlett Johansson, leaves her densely bovine boyfriend ("you sure didn't choose that one for his brains," laconically observes Bobby) and comes to live with the two men in the house because it had been owned by her mother, Lorraine Will, a charismatic folk singer, who has just died. Pursy also is persuaded by them to undertake a degree majoring in literature at the University of New Orleans. Throughout, there are quotations — pre-eminently from Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, which plays an important role in unveiling the dénouement, and also from Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Eugene O'Neill, Dylan Thomas, Charles Dickens, Robert Frost, George Sand, and many others, the quotations including Plato's "the unexamined life is not worth living."

As I watched the film, I realized that many central narrative incidents and some overall generic elements led to an even more specific reference in my own experience, perhaps unlikely to be a conscious source but a strong analog, Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Since it is among the least-performed of Shakespeare's plays (Skeele 1998, 52) and has been planned as an adaptation to the screen only once (via the unsuccessful and apparently now abandoned project *Pericles by Shakespeare on the Road* in 2014) and to television only in the widely criticized BBC/Time Life production (1984), it is not a play which has been culturally transmitted as widely as, for example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, or *The Tempest*. Its afterlife therefore lies at a level more subtly and even unconsciously present beneath the surface, the unacknowledged but flowing river of story. In summary, we have the following: the wandering and rootless *senex* hounded out of his natural habitat as a teacher of literature (the university professor was "loved by colleagues and students and hated by Faculty," we are told); a mysteriously absent, presumed dead mother; a young woman who acts as a catalyst for change and revival in the sordid household just as Marina reforms the brothel; and several other parallels leading to the ending where — at the risk of spoiling it for you — it is discovered that in fact the girl is the long-lost daughter of Professor Long. (Some fathers might be startled to learn that they have a daughter who is Scarlett Johansson, and some daughters would at least be surprised to find that John Travolta, aged and bloated but acknowledged as "handsome" by another young student, is their biological father. And in a different kind of search for generational "origins," viewers from the *Grease* era [1978] will see their hero dancing once again [twice, in fact], though this time more gingerly and sedately on his painful toe).

This was derided by critics as a "corny" ending to a "creaky" plot, and one reviewer complaining of "something mouldy about the setup" rather amazingly echoed the very word used by Ben Jonson to describe *Pericles* in "Ode to Himself":

No doubt a mouldy Tale,

Like Pericles, and stale  
 As the Shrive's crusts, and nasty as his Fish,  
 Scraps out of every Dish,  
 Throwne forth and rak'd into the common Tub. (Jonson 1954, 299)

All it lacks is the physical resurrection of the mother, who throughout has been very much the central presence metaphorically, if not literally, being a compelling focus of many memories and desires not only for Bobby and Pursy but also for the bar-room music-loving audience. Even from the grave she is the agent for crucial plot revelations. She does not in fact reappear, as Thaisa does in Shakespeare's play, but the revelations act as a more realistic resurrection than her physical presence would. The mysterious capacities of time to change and heal and of patience to ensure survival through to fulfilment are central to the vision of Shakespeare in his late romances, especially *Pericles*, and in a muted and modern way they are present also in the semi-miraculous reconciliation of father, daughter, and the still-lost mother, who is however in some ways regained through her music, in *A Love Song for Bobby Long*.

Some central motifs are common to Shakespearean romance and its ultimate sources: the restoration to the *senex* of a *virgo adulescens* who had been "lost," deprived of family status and forced into a seedy environment which by her natural vitality she helps to clean up (morally in Marina's case in the brothel; literally in Pursy's since she does the neglected housekeeping). Like Marina, Pursy is urged at one stage to take up prostitution in order to earn money, and she is questioned about her virginity, which becomes a matter of public speculation. An obvious parallel is the final reunion of parent and child through the *pistis* or "proof of identity" revelation, which comes in the movie in hinted revelations from a concert in which Pursy's mother's song is sung, which prompts memories from onlookers of her as a child, just as the return of the mother in *Pericles* is accompanied by divine music. Most crucially, we learn that Lorraine had dedicated a particular song to Bobby because he had given her a copy of the novel *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Finally, the revelation is achieved through a letter found by Pursy at the end of the film. Since it emerges that the mother's suppressed will has bequeathed the house to Pursy, the recovered daughter can live now in harmony rather than conflict with her newfound father, and various other emotional tensions are resolved. Lawson, who has a relationship not quite sexual and not quite platonic with Pursy, need no longer be the target of latent jealousy from Bobby, though we are not told the ultimate fate of his other longstanding and more carnal relationship with Georgianna. At least Bobby, Pursy, and Lawson can live in the same house together, happily (almost) ever after — at least until Bobby dies.

Most of the distant chimes of recognition of "origins" are sounded through similarities between Shakespeare's Marina and the movie's Purslane. Marina's mother Thaisa (so far as Pericles knows) has died in childbirth and consigned to the sea. Pursy's mother was similarly "lost" and it is a strong regret to the girl that she has no memories, as other children have, of childhood in a family, having grown up with an absent mother and unknown father (at least Marina knows the name of her father, but nothing more). The two young women are strikingly similar in appearance to their respective mothers — this is commented on in the film by all those who knew Lorraine, and is articulated also in the play:

My dearest wife  
 Was like this maid, and such a one  
 My daughter might have been: my queen's square brows;  
 Her stature to an inch; as wand-like straight;  
 As silver-voic'd; her eyes as jewel-like  
 And cas'd as richly; in pace another Juno;  
 Who starves the ears she feeds, and makes them hungry  
 The more she gives them speech. (5.1.106-13)

The characters are linked also through imagery. Although Marina is named after the sea on which she was born, she is associated even more strongly with flowers, as are Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and Innogen (or Imogen) in *Cymbeline*:

*Enter MARINA, with a basket of flowers*  
 No, I will rob Tellus of her weed,  
 To strew thy green with flowers; the yellows, blues,  
 The purple violets, and marigolds,  
 Shall as a carpet hang upon thy grave,  
 While summer-days doth last. (4.1.13-17)

In the editor's somewhat coy phrasing in the footnote of the 1963 Arden, "Marina is presented as a flower-maiden" (Hoeniger 1963, 102). And so is Purslane, whose name initiates debate about whether its referent is a flower or a weed. More than this, it is noticeable that in many of the scenes she is presented framed or even garlanded in flowers, or picking flowers, and even indoors where she has placed flowers in a vase. Of course, the central link between the two characters, Marina and Pursy, separated by centuries, is the more symbolic one in terms of their shared role in galvanizing

an older man who has lost his way and is ill and disappointed in life, comparable in many ways to Pericles.

There are other Shakespearean echoes, such as the role of Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*: not only does Pury "cure," "reform" and "clean up" the house, but like Helena, she is later called to exercise her "sacred physic" (5.1.74) on the "kingly patient" of Bobby. Pury is instrumental in getting Bobby to seek medical attention for his various ailments. In both cases, structurally and in narrative terms, it is the figure of the returning daughter who inadvertently restores the family — through full reconciliations of daughter, mother and father in *Pericles*, and through partial reconciliations in *Bobby Long*, since the mother does not "come back to life," though her presence is fundamental throughout in bringing emotional community. In its essence, Shakespearean romance is a genre which gives a "second chance" to individuals who have lost and strayed, and who might have died as tragic protagonists but are instead given renewal. This is also the inner rhythm or heartbeat of *A Love Song for Bobby Long*, as even the hard-bitten Bobby can see: "I'm thankful for a god that I thought had given up on me. And the love of a child." On her graduation from college, he quotes from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding":

In the glorious words of T. S. Eliot, "we shall not cease exploration, and the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time." And that's what you've given your old man, and he's forever grateful.

The words could be a postscript to each of Shakespeare's late romances, and it is perhaps worth noting that not long before Eliot wrote these lines he had composed the beautiful lyric "Marina," based consciously on *Pericles*: "What images return / O my daughter . . . I made this, I have forgotten / And remember . . . The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships" (Eliot 1963, 115).

If it is conceded that this rough-hewn but touching, bittersweet movie at least subliminally replicates the genre and narrative of *Pericles*, then we can look further back. Shakespeare based his story on a prose romance by Lawrence Twine, North's translation of Plutarch, and Sidney's *Arcadia*. All these drew on the story told in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (and in the film told by Lawson, since the professor's biographer functions as a Gower figure in the film), which derived from an Anglo-Saxon fragment and more directly from the fifth century Greek romance *Apollonius of Tyre*, which in its turn probably had lost origins in even more ancient Latin and Greek stories. (Suddenly my voluminous PhD research all those years ago, reading lengthy ancient romances in my own scholarly "origins," becomes useful for pattern recognition.) So here we have an example of an unbroken line of a particular *kind* of story, a genre with many elements in common, stretching back from today to Shakespeare to Gower to classical times: a nice example of the river of stories

arising from some distant, lost "origins," but continuing to flow even in unperceived or "spectral" fashion.

### The Journey Home

My third example might seem on the face of it more facetious and unexpected, being a joyful Australian Aboriginal film, *Bran Nue Dae* (2009), but I hope at least briefly to show how it replicates the dominant patterning structures of *Pericles*, the journey itself leading once again to spectacular family reconciliations. In some ways the case is more easily made than in the other examples, even though actual indebtedness to Shakespeare's play is more unlikely in the case of the musical comedy. As already mentioned, it is worth observing that in *Pericles* — no musical in our sense — music does occur at important, transitional moments, which is more likely to be appreciated in performance than in reading. *A Love Song for Bobby Long* is also full of music from start to end, and it is a song that helps unravel the plot. However, the fact that *Bran Nue Dae* is generically a musical means that the "origins" which I find covertly evident in *Pericles* in this case lie on the surface, in plot motifs and incidents rather than in the emotional resonances touched in *Bobby Long*. Since the latter is full of literary allusions it does not seem inappropriate to argue for these depths, whereas *Bran Nue Dae* is a more improbable vehicle for a Shakespearean story. However, even this might contribute to the theme of literary origins, in signaling that the stories are embedded more deeply in cultures, less textual than experiential in genesis, than might at first meet the eye.

*Bran Nue Dae's* similarity to the kind of play *Pericles* lies mainly in the journey as structuring device, with some surprisingly comparable incidents along the way. It is set in the past (1969), and more particularly, in both works the journey is away from and then back towards origins. Aboriginal beliefs are so centered in "country" as starting places and destinations, in nomadic journeys and returns to "home," that the paradigm is deeply cultural. "Uncle Tadpole" explains in the film the importance of where a person begins life in terms of personal totems of animals or parts of the landscape, and he links this lore with the pre-human, dreamtime state from whence all ancestry and human history derive, according to Aboriginal beliefs. Later, the central character has a strange dream of "bush people" that is explained as "the old people, looking after us," just as in a sense Gower "takes care of us" in the play. This character, sixteen-year-old Willy (quite coincidentally, Marina is sixteen at the end of *Pericles* and Perdita at the end of *The Winter's Tale*), defines his own life through travel away from and then back to Broome, where his boyhood dream lover Rosie lives.

The refrain of "Coming back home" recurs — "we all want to go home." Willy must first depart from his mother and home for a repressive Catholic boarding school in Perth which, with its sinister

and sadistic headmaster Father Benedictus (played salaciously and with a harsh, mock-German accent by Geoffrey Rush), brings the innocent boy into as close proximity to "sin" (in this case theft and "impure thoughts") as Pericles in the corrupt court of Antiochus. Willy, incriminated in a burglary of chocolates and Coca Cola, flees, as does Pericles, undergoing a life of travel, in this case leading back "home" to Broome over 2,000 kilometers away. He is accompanied by the roguish, self-styled elder Uncle Tadpole (Ernie Dingo), whose home is also Broome. The journey confronts Willy with temptations and dangers, such as the attentions of the "hot" storekeeper Roadhouse Betty, and then beneath the "condom tree" in a brothel in Wyndham where he almost loses his virginity to the promiscuous Theresa. His innocence is as inviolate as Marina's. He also has a stint in jail, though the cause is not his fault, and is several times beaten up.

Like those of Pericles, Willy's wanderings are marked by a pattern of misunderstood innocence under siege, through which both protagonists must exercise "Patience . . . smiling Extremity out of act" (*Pericles* 5.1.139). All along the way there are incidents that mirror those encountered by Pericles on his wanderings. At the same time, there are parallel journeys in the movie. Willy and Tadpole emotionally blackmail a couple of tourists in a combi-van: the German student Wolfgang and his girlfriend Annie, a free-spirited hippy and flower-child played by the singer Missy Higgins, who in "real life" is now associated with northern Western Australia and Broome specifically. It is a cultural journey for them too, forced as they are to accept the wily ways and cultural differences of their aboriginal passengers. Meanwhile, the vindictive Father Benedictus also heads for Broome in pursuit of the fleeing Willy, vowing to bring him back to the school.

Early in *Bran Nue Dae*, Tadpole, in his own confused way, tries to explain the importance and complexity of Australian indigenous kinship relationships, in which a person will have many more "aunties" and "uncles" than Europeans would concede. The subject is presented in *Pericles* in a more solemn tone, with both incest and family reconciliation instrumental in the narrative. In the Australian film, the gear shifts when they all reach Broome, where Willy's eventual declaration of love to Rosie galvanizes an extraordinary, festive and celebratory final movement on the Broome beach, worthy even of Shakespeare in *As You Like It*. The scene virtually parodies the family disclosures in *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and even the long, drawn-out and elaborate equivalent in *Cymbeline* that was regarded by Bernard Shaw as self-parodying. The young lovers kiss, and on this "night of miracles" (though it is broad daylight), sinners are called to testify.

Annie steps forward and confesses to being a "bad person" who has been "bent on free love," had a child out of wedlock when she was sixteen, and gave it away — she is forgiven. Theresa, the prostitute from Wyndham, steps forward to confess that she had and lost a child to another man, at which moment the ridiculous figure of the German Father Benedictus appears on the hillside,

arms outstretched ("behold, a vision from God"). He is revealed as the father of the child, which he "took away to Germany twenty years ago." On cue, Wolfgang the young German traveler rushes forward to greet on bended knees "my father" and turns to "meine mutter" who responds "my son, my son." Wolfgang ecstatically declares "I am an Aborigine!" Uncle Tadpole then "tells his story" that he once had a wife who had a child by another man — pointing to a woman in the surpliced, evangelical choir, who of course turns out to be Willy's mother. Willy in turn forswears his vocation for the priesthood in favour of marrying Rosie and staying "home" with his mother and rediscovered father. As they all gather for the feast, (the very white) Annie tries improbably and vainly to join the kinship network too: "Actually, I've got another confession, I was adopted out as a child and all I remember was being pulled from a sea of wailing black faces and being raised in the city to be a white. I mean, I'm one of you guys, I'm an Aborigine too!" After a skeptical few seconds of silence, Tadpole rejoins sardonically, "You've got to be kidding . . . Today, everybody's an Aborigine." And the true celebrations begin. Somehow *Bran Nue Dae* manages to out-Pericles *Pericles* in its exaggerated deployment of the same elements derived from the river of the story.

The formal study of sources, influences and analogs in literature and drama can take us only a part of the journey in answering some questions that are probably inexplicable in any final way. Scholars writing footnotes are understandably cautious, refraining from drawing links unless they are undeniable from some obviously textual evidence, disdaining the ancient and sometimes oral evidence. R. B. McKerrow was one of the sternest of such advocates, laying down with the exactitude of a lawyer the rules to be applied in testing for the existence of a source (McKerrow 1939; Honigmann 1954). Not everybody would wish to remain so limited. Some might be attracted to a kind of universalist or at least intertextual approach, based on the assumption that some stories cross cultures and historical periods, re-surfacing in unexpected ways. Others may argue that stories are constantly being recycled, culturally transmitted, and adapted across time, down through history. Whether certain historical periods are, for some reason or other, drawn to revive particular narratives and genres is another question that must remain mysteriously open and suggestive of different answers.

My analogy of stories as rivers is intended to open up a larger vista and more far-reaching conceptualisation of source study. Using the image, we find origins flowing into streams and currents that endlessly replicate, defer, conceal, recycle, and constantly return — "and the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started." From upland source to its emergence in the distant ocean, the river is always the same and yet always different, moving through time, but timeless. The story of Pericles, the quasi-mythical Prince and later King of Tyre, depends on ancient chroniclers and storytellers coming back on each occasion to retell the story over again in

new ways, with different emphases, "To sing a song that old was sung": and now, if my intuitions are not entirely wrong, it has come to be sung through the medium of film. Shakespeare may well have been bemused to think of his "mouldy" old play, which he had found as "a song that old was sung" dating back to ancient Greece, itself becoming, four centuries on, a new point of origin — formally unacknowledged but often uncannily similar — for these three, very diverse movies, as transmissions of different aspects of a river that might be dubbed "the Pericles story."

### Notes

1. All citations of *Pericles* come from *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (2001).



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