Alchemical feminism: the power and authority of women in Shakespeare's Pericles

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ALCHEMICAL FEMINISM:
THE POWER AND AUTHORITY OF
WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE’S *PERICLES*

by

Kathryn M. Corah

A Thesis
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of English
2019
To my mother for instilling in me a sense of creativity,
my father for working hard to improve his life,
my sister for their boundless support,
and my brother, for his intense cunning and wit.

In loving memory
of Thomas Flood.
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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare and George Wilkin’s romance play, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, is an example of a Renaissance narrative that includes alchemical subtext. There have been many academic articles and dissertations written on this subject; I seek to build upon these previous arguments to expand upon their premises to argue that this alchemical diction and iconography of alchemical emblems allows for Marina and Thaisa to promote the power latent in feminine-coded virtue as it resists against patriarchal violence and reforms a masculinist patriarchal system. The lens I utilized to analyze the text in my exploration of this topic, which I named alchemical feminism, is born of this conflict between the alchemically regenerative feminine and the alchemically degradative masculine. What culminates is a reformation of the patriarchal monarchical system to allow for broader authority and agency of women, though these women are still beholden to many shortcomings regarding freedom or autonomy, even with this reformation. The alchemically feminist lens reveals the way these interactions of alchemical diction and emblem create this broadening of feminine authority in the face of violent patriarchal norms.
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William Shakespeare and George Wilkin’s collaborative 1608 romance, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* utilized a semiotic and emblematic tradition. This play, on its surface, is a tale of love and grief, and as such has been traditionally read as a romance, though its genre has been debated. Reading it through an alchemical lens, however, reveals a deeper meaning to the narrative. I’m not the first academic to analyze *Pericles* using alchemy: Lyndy Abraham and Roger Dale Sorensen have written extensively on the alchemical emblems that are present within the narrative and how these emblems construct a tale of Marina, the hero of the story, as the alchemical *magnum opus*. The *opus*, known by a variety of names including the divine water, the elixir of life, or Philosopher’s Stone, was considered the highest achievement an alchemist could seek to have within their grasp. This material would be able to purify any substance, would heal any wound, revive the dead, and even gift immortality. While there is no doubt *Pericles* is a play with a deep consideration of alchemy, the arguments that Abraham and Sorensen do not go far enough to reach the logical conclusion of what Marina as *magnum opus* implies for the narrative and culture at large. I seek to extend these arguments to posit that Marina, created by alchemical emblem, utilizes the process of alchemical purification or perfection to cleanse the narrative of a corrupted patriarchal government. This purification allows for a federation of balanced monarchs to take its place, a governmental body rife with lies and violence punished so that the female body can live freely within the monarchical system. This process of using alchemically charged emblems to rid the narrative of a corrupt patriarchal influence is one that anticipates feminism: it is alchemical feminism. By creating and empowering a female character to be the authority which sees this transmutation through, the resolution of the conflict becomes motivated by this alchemical feminist drive to create a society where the female body is respected and protected.
Marina is not the only woman in the narrative capable of wielding this form of regenerative femininity: her mother Thaisa does, to a lesser extent, as well. Each become capable of acts of purification, such as Thaisa’s rise from death and Marina’s regeneration of Pericles. The triforme nature of the conflict within the narrative each operates on behalf of the corrupted system of patriarchy to commit violence or allow violation of the female body and to suppress the truth of that corruption beneath a facade of nobility. In Marina’s central acts of purification, this violence and the very possibility of this violence is excised from the protagonists and from the system itself. This is significant: if the violence of the patriarchal monarchy it absent, women are able to flourish within the newly reformed monarchy and have, in part, more authority over themselves; balance allows a kind of equality within the broader Renaissance monarchical system. Women within it would not overtly fear the violation of their bodies on behalf of male authority, though as patriarchy is systemic, they would be oppressed in different ways. Through these alchemical emblems present in *Pericles*, Marina becomes the holder of the regenerative power of quintessence and cleanses Pericles of his infection derived from a toxic form of patriarchy that relies upon violating the female form.

In the early years of the Western Renaissance, many ancient texts regarding alchemy were rediscovered, and as such alchemy became an intriguing mix of early scientific theory, philosophy, and mythology. Texts such as Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the works of Plato were translated into early modern English, thus allowing the audience of Renaissance England to, for the first time, engage with ancient Greco-Roman scientific tradition. The popularity of alchemy led to many men immortalized in time from their influence, such as Dr. John Dee, Nicholas Flamel, and Paracelsus, all whom contributed greatly to alchemical scholarship during their lifetimes. While alchemy is most notably recalled for the great search for
the Philosopher’s Stone, or *magnum opus*, which would transmute base metals such as copper into gold or gift immortal life, alchemy was more than that specific quest. It led the curious to attempt to discover the properties of the world and to then apply those discoveries to solve problems. Over time, this alchemical process became a scientific one, giving way to early chemistry and pharmacology. For a Renaissance audience, alchemy would not only be relevant, it would be familiar; the alchemical diction and semiotics located within *Pericles* would be easily understood by such audiences.

I have structured this thesis along the nine gates of alchemical purification, to further my argument that the narrative is indeed based within alchemy. These nine gates are steps that a body must pass through in order to be purified or perfected, and each fit within the linear plot structure of *Pericles* through semiotics and emblems in a similarly linear fashion. The first gate of purification is called Calcination: this marks an introduction of violence upon the body which leaves a wound, and the presence of this wound calls for further action (Muir 30). To reforge this wounded body, the soul must be separated through entrance into the second gate, called Dissolution. This dissolution of the body must occur within water, as water is the only element capable of “holding” the soul as well as making the body malleable (Muir 30). Without the regenerative powers of the *magnum opus*, the process of purification cannot conclude; this necessitates entrance into the third gate, Conjunction or Coupling. Signified by a king and queen consummating their marriage within the *aqua marina*, this union creates the infant *magnum opus* and the body of one of the parents immediately enters the next gate, Putrefaction (Jacobus 12). Putrefaction is the temporary death of one of the parents of the Stone, the death symbolically fuelling new life (Muir 31). With this new life, this new Stone, made and another life temporarily ended, the body enters the gate of Congelation or Extraction; here, the child is left to take a noble
shape under the care of foster parents, signified by the child “flying” from the parents (Jacobus 17). The next gate, Citation or Mundification, marks the cleansing of the wound by another application of water, which begins an act of regeneration that calls the soul to the body (Muir 31, Jacobus 20). The wound, nearly cleansed of infection, heralds entrance through the gate of Sublimation, where that which has been corrupted is regenerated (Jacobus 22). The eighth gate, Fermentation, is signified by both parents receiving wings, indicating they’ve reached their perfected forms (Jacobus 28). Finally, they pass through the final gate of Exaltation or Perfection, having successfully been regenerated from their wound, and they exit the *aqua marinera* (Muir 31, Jacobus 43).

The language within *Pericles* is heavily steeped in elemental association, and through these elemental associations, a broader gendering of language takes place. The four elements, as part of a broader alchemical tradition attempting to understand the nature of the universe, came to align themselves with particular conceptions of gender. Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* contributed heavily to the Western alchemical tradition of gendering elements, and was a rediscovered text of the early Renaissance, contributing in part to a new fascination with alchemy as philosophy and science. In it, Ptolemy categorized the celestial bodies by their perceived natures: hot, dry, moist, and cold. Each of these properties was tied to an element: fire, air, water, and earth. The sun, associated with heat and dryness, was considered masculine, whilst the moon was female due to its moisture and coldness (22). The four elemental properties were believed to comprise all things, from the microcosm of the body to the macrocosm of the universe itself. Similarly, the times of day associated with the sun and moon were gendered: the day was masculine, whilst the night was feminine (22). This is important, as certain moments of the narrative are tied to specific times of day or to their association with particular times of day. These elements or times
of day were then constructed with accompanying abilities and meanings: earth, fertile and cold, was capable of obfuscating or revealing material truth; water is the “solvent of the world” that could break down or hold all things, and is pure; air was noble, as it is the force of nourishment as well as that which conserves the other three; and fire was an element of a purity that the human body could not withstand, immolation becoming a form of purification due to this, and due to its nature is directly tempered by the earth (Muir 23).

As the conflict of the narrative is born of toxic masculine entitlement upon the female body and the violence that ensues from that entitlement, this toxic masculinity is therefore possible to trace through the language used by the characters. From there, we can conclude which characters utilize alchemical feminism to purify their surroundings or those who resist this process of purification. As the alchemical tradition genders fire and air as male, earth and water as female, then it should become clear through an analysis of the text that those characters aligned with male authority and violence use fire and air imagery in their speech, or are characterized by others as being aligned with those elements. Conversely, characters aligned with femininity and regeneration will be similarly marked by their usage or association with earth and water.

The usage of elemental imagery in Pericles aligns male authority with violence. Antagonists turn their elemental associations into weaponry, fire becoming an all-consuming lust or greed, air that which feeds it and carries the ash as an airborne disease to infect others or into a subtle knife. Alternatively, protagonists hold themselves as creatures of the earth, as plants seeking sunlight or trees with roots to be guarded, or as tempestuous waters or storms. This division is not crafted solely upon the gender of the character, either, but upon their association with continuing a destabilized monarchical system or healing that wound of imbalanced
patriarchy to allow a proper system of kingship to take place. Those characters that act as villains utilize fire/air imagery to display their connection and allegiance to toxic masculinity, often utilizing these elements to oppress water or earth through their language. Heroic characters resist this toxicity and overcome the violence of fire and air through their own water/earth imagery, or they utilize all four elements as positive forces in balance, as a broader representation of gender equality or partnership. These constructions demarcate the moral alignment of each character and follow a trail of alchemical emblems that describe the purification process as well as the creation of the magnum opus, or the Philosopher’s Stone. They also show within the language used whether a particular character desires the oppressive weight of patriarchal violence and authority or seeks to resist this oppressive force - and it is within the resistance against this toxicity where alchemical feminism is found, in the hands of Marina and Thaisa.

Calcination

In Antioch, Pericles begins to suffer a perturbation born of knowledge of corruption, and this perturbation is part of a wound that comes from the suppression of this truth. The fact of this perturbation is made clear through Pericles’ constant suffering through oceanic tempests, as the tempests become an externalization of his own mental state. As the ocean was central to the lives of many in England as an island nation reliant upon an ability to sail and navigate the seas, oceanic emblems came to represent more than just difficulty with navigation, it implied difficulty with life itself (Roychoudhury 1015). These tempests serve to represent a particular type of Renaissance emblem regarding navigating the ocean. The ocean is a primordial force within semiotics and emblems; Freud’s definition of “oceanic” was that “‘primal symbiosis of infant and mother’”, connecting the ocean to motherhood (Roychoudhury 1014). These early modern English emblems are the realization of lingual bonds formed between seemingly dissonant
subjects: the ocean, unruly and untameable, was constructed within mental schemata as a material realization of emotional and mental turbulence (Roychoudhury 1014). Thus this particular grouping of English emblems relating to the ocean were created from these schemata, the image of the tempest or the boat within the tempest coming to signify personal struggle; the descriptions and analyses of these emblems serve to further emphasize their meaning and moralize to their audience. These same oceanic emblems also came to represent related concepts of death, regeneration, and putrefaction. The ocean was a location rife with mystery and violence, the ability to navigate it an incredibly important skill, the possibility of surviving it not guaranteed.

The perturbation that Pericles suffers from is one created from an act antithetical to virtue and innocence - it is, in fact, a theft of both. It is a theft of innocence in that his actions have stolen Antiochus’ daughter’s sexual innocence, as well as the innocence that is meant to exist within the love between father and daughter; it is also a theft of virtue as servants are forced to keep quiet as well as the people who unknowingly support and serve their incestuous king. Antiochus spreads the corruption born of these thefts by relying upon Pericles’ silence or death to maintain a false nobility. He not only ruins his own legacy, he ruins his daughter’s chances even should he die and she live; the act has stolen both her innocence and her possibility to create an untainted family of her own or perpetuate her own noble legacy. This signification of theft connects to several oceanic emblems, as well. A well known collection of emblems was published by George Wither, who had received a large collection of copper engraved emblems and proceeded to split them into two categories: moral and religious. Many of these emblems utilized the ocean, water representing not only a tempest but a representative for fate or destiny. Emblem XXXVII, or “He, that his Course directly Steeres”, imagines “ev’ry Man … as a Pilot,
to some Vessel there, Of little size, or else of larger frame” (65, fig. 1). This particular emblem ascribes the ocean as a sign for a form of fate, and that in order to properly captain a “ship”, they must do so with the “Waves, and Windes, and that oft-changing Weather” of the world, not against it (65). The signification of fate is the ocean, and this fate is motivated primarily to protect those with virtue, as seen in emblem X, “An Innocent no Danger feares”. The classical Arion is saved from the “Seas of Troubles” by a dolphin who recognizes his “Vertue”, thus correlating the navigation of the ocean or “Seas of Trouble” or fate to virtue (38, fig. 2).

The perturbation Pericles suffers from is one that follows him from Antioch as he suppresses the knowledge of what occurs there, and thus becomes complicit in the same façade he despises. This suppression of truth brings Pericles to suffer within the tempest, and so he suffers under the weight of emblematic connections of the oceanic tempest. The stormy sea is connected alchemically to death and regeneration: his suffering summons that which has the
ability to dissolve and heal it. He suffers a wound, but not upon his body, and not purely within his mind; it bridges the two, and his soul seeks to purify the virtue within it. This perturbation becomes a force much larger than him, affecting not only his ship and crew but later in the narrative his wife and daughter. And this becomes significant, as his externalized perturbation culminates in the creation of his daughter and the magnum opus, Marina. Thus this infection of his form, in alchemical terms, is a calcination of his form: formed from an intense application of fire, the body is wounded. As the flame which applied the wound lies in Antioch, whose hand held the torch? What does that which fuels this torch imply about the wound?

Antiochus, King of the eponymous Antioch, stands before Pericles underneath the piked heads of those failed suitors who came before. He uses violence to suppress the truth of his rule and to protect his authority: that he has violated the bonds of kinship, violated the body of his daughter and the natural order of things, and thus violated his very ability to properly govern his kingdom or further his legacy. This violation of the female body, specifically within the contexts of incest, is a violent abuse on part of the patriarchal system that Antiochus represents as King among the variety of abuses that the patriarchal system creates. Aside from incest, the violence he perpetuates as a king murdering the princes of other countries serves to corrupt not only his connection to a godly force as a true king need not use violence to create authority but also serves to prevent his ability to ally with other nations; he has, through his act of violence and violation, made his kingdom an island led by a corrupted, false ruler. The act also highlights the impossibility of proper rulership, as incest not only represents an abuse of the female body, but also makes it impossible for Antiochus to legitimate his own legacy (Moore 37). The main conflict within the narrative is born from the occurrences in Antioch; the conflict is, then, violence upon the female body and the way this violence destabilizes the familial unit, thwarts
feudal inheritance patterns, as well as the violence incurred on behalf of suppressing this truth. The violence is directed not only at the female body, which is being violated, but also violates the very system of kingship; it necessitates regeneration not only on part of the violated female body but also upon the system of kingship. Pericles, as a new monarch seeking to legitimate his own rule and create his legacy is especially vulnerable to this particular form of violence. He suppresses truth because he must successfully create a family in order to become a true king and should he die that would be impossible; he also suppresses truth because it is a corruption he could never imagine within the governmental system he has grown up in. He learns something new and terrible about the world, and it alters his mental state and makes him temporarily unable to govern his own kingdom; it becomes a calcination, which operates as a form of mental perturbation. The perturbation is then externalized within the ocean on behalf of Pericles as holder and suppressor of the same truth Antiochus holds and suppresses, and of the women violated on part of an overreach of male authority and entitlement. Antiochus holds the torch of violent fire, the threat of murder and the knowledge of that violence he has committed upon his daughter. This calcination of Pericles calls for alchemical purification. It calls for balance between the gendered elements, as women serve an important role in the monarchy, especially when treated as partners by their spouses.

Antiochus is marked as a man of too much fire, whose murderous urges are “as near to lust as flame to smoke”, this fire fed by the assumption of nobility and run rampant with a violent lust (I.i.144). He is, like Pericles when he flees, affected by calcination. Due to this calcination, he subverts the alchemical construction of kingliness as one with a perfect balance of fire and air; Antiochus allows “heaven” to be consumed to feed the “flames” of his lust for an incestual coupling and for murder. Pericles’ wound is born of a brush with this violence, and his
subsequent suppression of the truth of Antioch, as well as his repression of his own emotions in
response to this violence. He also brings forth an image of violent air: “For vice repeated is like
the wand’ring wind, / Blows dust in others’ eyes to spread itself” and “the sore eyes see clear /
To stop the air would hurt them” (I.i.99-103). This version of air feeds and spreads itself to
corrupt others, and so he counters these violent fire and air images with invocations of the earth
and the suffering of earthly creatures:

Pericles
The blind mole casts
Copped hills towards heaven, to tell the earth is
thronged
By man’s oppression, and the poor worm doth
die for ‘t. (I.i.103-5)

This oppressed earth is immediately followed by a resignation towards the force exerting that
oppression: “Kings are earth’s gods; in vice their laws their will” (I.i.106). He acknowledges the
wrongness of it yet doesn’t attempt to stop it - his passivity becomes suppression which becomes
compliance. This corrupted patriarchy hangs above the earth as a weight, forcing all beneath it
into the shape desired by that toxic system of kingship.

Pericles’ psychic wound is introduced through his reading of the riddle, surrounded by
the violence it has created in the quest to answer it, as well as the fact he understands that there is
no answer to be found; he believes that should he do anything but flee and keep his silence, he
will bring doom to his kingdom and to himself:

Pericles, reading the Riddle
I am no viper, yet I feed
On Mother’s flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labor
I found that kindness in a father.
He’s father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife, and yet his child.
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live resolve it you.
[Aside] Sharp physic is the last! But, O you powers
That gives heaven countless eyes to view men’s acts,
Why cloud they not their sights perpetually
If this be true which makes me pale to read it? (I.i.65-77)

Antiochus, as corrupted monarch, is capable of producing poison, connecting his rule to the alchemical emblem of the ouroboros. The emblem used within this riddle, of cannibalism and of vipers, was prominent in specific alchemical texts, specifically within those written by the famous Nicholas Flamel. It represented incest in addition to the readily observed sign of cannibalism, as the elements of “sulphur and argent vive” are akin to serpents which “bite one another cruelly” with “great poason [sic] and furious rage” (Abraham 528). This infinitely violating conflict was commonly used as a symbol for that introduction of flaw into the body, of a rust appearing within the process of calcination by application of “drying up” in the heat of this fury (Abraham 528). Antiochus’ riddle calls forth this violent emblem, twisting this reptilian mobius strip into an alchemically incestual entanglement. The act of reading is followed by Pericles’ wish that a distant and noble heaven had shielded him from the knowledge of such a violation existing, tying together the male-aligned air of heaven with the act of seeing. This ability to see is further obscured - from heaven and other, ignorant men - by that “vice repeated” blown as “dust in other’s eyes”, both an illusion and an airborne pathogen of male violence (I.i.99-100). This toxic spore of vice-made-dust alters air from noble house of heaven to that which steals breath - “the breath is gone” - and hurts to breathe - “the air would hurt them” (I.i.102-3). Countering this violence is that of the earth, which is “thronged / by man’s oppression” and kills even the smallest, weakest creature - “the poor worm” - beneath the heavy weight of a law made from and for a will of vice (I.i.104-6). The vice, here, is not only a stain - or “abuse” - upon the soul, but a manipulation of the system of kingship the play suggests should be held as a partnership between balanced equals. Antiochus, instead of furthering his legacy by
marrying another noble and unrelated queen, crushes the possibility of sharing his rule with anyone else in a companionate marriage; he has imbalanced himself and his kingdom, and in doing so, Pericles becomes aware of the lengths men will go to in order to desperately keep a firm grasp upon as much power as they can. The corrupt will becomes law which becomes violation - and Pericles, even suffering this infection as victim and “worm” of the “thronged” earth is capable of realizing that where a corrupted air hangs - as “smoke” - “flame” must be near, and violence will deepen its grip (I.i.144). Antiochus then produces poison, just as the viper he and his daughter imagine themselves to be, to his complicit servant Thaliard and as his speech lowers into prose to denote his descent into further sin and broadening distance from nobility, crafts air into a weapon in the form of “an arrow shot from a well-experienced / archer” (I.i.172-3). He seeks to stop Pericles from revealing a truth which would end his reign just as Pericles resolves to suppress it to save himself and his kingdom, fearing a retaliatory war. The act of fleeing and the act of poisoning both serve the abusive patriarchy in the same way: to preserve the veneer of virtue and nobility within kingship without actualizing either.

Pericles makes himself a member of the “thronged”, oppressed earth, relying upon the nurturing of the soil and the protection of the sea, keenly fearing a violent encroachment from a corrupted kingdom seeking to consume all that resists its vicious will. His flight from Antioch is characterized by the onset of the perturbation from an abusive patriarchy, formed from his belief he must keep silent this sinful Antioch and thus festering untended within him, the calcination within his body a “sad companion” of “dull-eyed Melancholy” (I.ii.3). Critically, this calcination is called by Pericles a “conception by misdread”, and what is birthed by this dawning horror is an extension of an oppressive and violent male influence (I.ii.3-15). He begins to fear “hostile forces” or “arms” that seek to re-establish control over the female “land”, stopping the watery
“course” that would carry the knowledge of sin to all (I.ii.25-6). He therefore connects himself to this “o’er-spread” land by making his “body pine”, a pun which serves to make his body a tree which grows to heights that press against the heavens, and lowers his connection into the earth itself which seeks to “fence the roots they grow by and defend them” (I.ii.33-5). Instead of characterizing himself as pure and virtuous water which would tell the truth, he becomes solid earth instead, seeking to withstand that truth as well as obfuscate it.

Pericles seeks safety and healing as he stops in Tyre, where Helicanus attempts to counter the effects of this suppression by supporting his king through language of nourishment, regeneration, and growth, resisting the greed and all-consuming fire of unchecked lust in Antioch. Notably, Helicanus is the only person Pericles tells the secret he holds; he trusts in the fact that Helicanus is as an endlessly loyal servant, speaking “like a physician”, to apply earthen language to soothe and actively denying the violence of male-aligned elements. To Helicanus,

… flattery is the bellows blows up sin;
The thing which is flattered, but a spark
To which that wind gives heat and stronger glowing (I.ii.42-4)

and so a good servant should, acting both as submissive “plant” and strong foundation for monarchy, “look up to heaven”, uncorrupted by sin, in perfect balance with the sun (I.ii.59-60). However capable Helicanus is, he is unable to cure Pericles’ wound; Pericles already foresees a “tempest” that he’s unable to stop, his body craving dissolution at sea.

True dissolution is denied until Pericles embarks from Tarsus, a location which carries more corruption within its borders and leadership, further compounding the diction of calcination introduced at Antioch. Both Dionyza and Cleon mark themselves and their kingdom as elementally under the oppressive weight of toxic masculinity. The famine in Tarsus is another
subversion of the natural course: it invokes the phantom of cannibalism once more, however instead of the child feeding “On Mother’s flesh” it is the

Those mothers who, to nuzzle up their babes, Thought naught too curious, are ready now to eat those little darlings whom they loved (I.iv.43-5).

The famine is a grief characterized as “fire” by Dionyza, brought on by, perhaps, a society which did not respect “heaven”, their “towers … so high they kissed the clouds”, indicating a greed or arrogance which brought upon them their fall (I.iv.25). Notably, this “fire” that Dionyza speaks of is unable to be smothered by earth, indicating her inability to align herself with regeneration. This grief has consumed the fruits of the earth and the nourishment of a heaven that would seek to regenerate it, and Dionyza invokes an earth which maintains an artificial and infertile balance: “For who digs hills because they do aspire / Throws down one mountain to cast up higher” (I.i.5-6). In essence, the earth cannot be worked under her reign or used to provide reprieve for this fire: there are none in Tarsus able to create from earth, no air to bring nourishment, no fresh water to allay thirst and water crop; the element of greed has consumed all else within the kingdom. It takes Pericles, perturbed as he is and aligned with the “o’erpressed” earth, to bring a gift of corn and water, proving even in his perturbed state his ability to produce nutrition from the earth, the way he can even in his current state support his own lands. Pericles maintains a distance from furthering patriarchal violence by providing this gift: he and his men are not “a beacon fired” to further destroy Tarsus - they are physicians (I.iv.88). In his gift of corn he heals the wound of hunger and cannibalism, and forges an alliance not simply with Cleon and Dionyza, but with those oppressed, starving citizens - the poor worms of Tarsus. He proves a better leader than those who rule, providing a population not within his own borders the image of what could be a true king. Their alliance and loyalty to Pericles is ultimately affirmed by how
they exact justice on his behalf, revenging the attempted assassination of Marina. The truth of Pericles is that he is able to be a leader and prove his status as a King and Sun in miniature, however his calcination makes him unable to take the throne in reality; he has been utterly destabilized by this wound, the balance within himself which would allow him to rule in earnest needing to be righted, and this correction requires dissolutio.

Dissolution

The alchemical moon is female, governing the female ocean; Pericles approaches it, wounded as he is by a fire built by patriarchal entitlement and fed by lust, and is submerged. Water is a feminine force, in emblem, and myth; this connection expands the possibilities within the female body as well as the possibilities lying dormant within a Pericles who seeks to enter the waters of the ocean. If alchemical femininity is water, that which water is capable of is that which women are capable of; thus, women are capable of carrying that force of regeneration into their interactions with others, aligning them with the purification of the narrative conflict. The ocean holds the power of putrefaction and regeneration - femininity carries that implication within Pericles. Why is the ocean considered female? Classically, it is considered a location controlled by male gods, kings of the oceanic depths.\(^1\) However, the ocean is ultimately controlled by the moon, which in its gravitational lock with the earth pushes and pulls the tides dependent upon its location within the sky. To understand the femininity of the ocean, we must

\(^1\) The moon was not considered a feminine force everywhere. *Moon Lore*, an 1885 book written by Timothy Harley, argues that the moon is a male celestial body and the sun female, citing a variety of mythologies, including Egypt, India, Germany, and South America. The primary divinity associated with the moon prior to the Roman Selene was a male god named Lunus, who was replaced by the cult of Selene over time (83). However, alchemical tradition utilizes a different collection of mythologies and philosophies: primarily rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition which has several female deities tied to the moon, as well as the alchemical philosophy derived from Chinese alchemists. Chinese mythology held the moon as “chief and director” of all things related to Yin, the feminine qi, which was characterized by darkness, earth, and water (134). 4th century Chinese alchemist Baopuzi considered the moon to be “the vital essence” that “governs water: and hence, when the moon is at its brightest, the tides are high” (134).
look first to that celestial body which governs it: the moon, which in the alchemical tradition is
signified as a beautiful woman or white queen. Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* is an example of an
ancient alchemically-oriented text which classifies the moon as female, describing its effects on
the ocean as: “By the changes of her illumination, rivers swell and are reduced; the tides of the
sea are ruled by her risings and settings” (4). Her control does not stop at simply the tides of the
ocean, however: Ptolemy’s moon is one who dictates putrefaction and fertility dependent on the
current phase, and was used both as a “means of prognostication” as well as a calendar by which
to direct the harvest (17).

Water is the solvent of the world. Water is also feminine; Pericles’ desire for purification
brings him to a force governed and aligned with femininity, seeking to quench and cool the male
violence responsible for his calcination within the feral body of the ocean. For the creation of
the *magnum opus*, water is a critical component. It serves as the substance from which it
emerges. As water - specifically the *aqua marina* – it was the only material capable of holding
the soul of an object. As the *magnum opus* was viewed as an object that maintained a purity
gifted by god, it must be birthed within these waters and exit these waters fully formed. The
many names of the *opus* once it exits these waters elicit variations in the kind of substance it’s
imagined to be, as it could be solid or liquid. The *Rosarium philosophorum*, included in the
second volume of Cyriacus Jacobus’ *De Alchemia* calls water “the sperm of all metals” in which
“all metals are resolved into” (2). The *opus* is a water “congealed into Gold and Silver and resists
the fire and is resolved again into its water of which it is compounded in its kind” (92). While
conceptualizing water as sperm may seem to masculinize it, it very much resolves itself as
feminine: it is only realized as a substance within the womb, in which the body of metals are able
to be held in their liquid and malleable state. And more importantly, the *soul* of the metal, that
which was connected to spirituality and purification, was capable of residing within water (Muir 6). To perfect a material, to perfect the body, the body must return to that which birthed it: the oceanic womb of the *aqua marina*, that primal symbiosis of mother and child, of being held within a transformative and liminal space. It is no surprise, then, that the *opus* was also called the “Stormy Sea”: rebirth was not without its violence (Sorensen 189).

The material body, in the alchemical process, was affected by a wound and to rid the body of it, the body must be destroyed so that it may once more be made whole; water becomes a location in which dissolution and putrefaction must occur before rebirth. Paracelsus, famous 16th century alchemist said on this topic: “Destruction perfects that which is good; for the good cannot appear on account of that which conceals it” (Muir 7). The wording here is particular: as Pericles is concealing the truth of the patriarchal system, he draw to him the need for the destruction of this concealment and the powers that made him feel as though he must conceal the truth. Pericles’ becomes a subject in this alchemical process, as alchemy was more than the forefather of chemistry: it was a philosophy, and as such was often viewed with a transcendental component. Man was a metal in the eyes of God, and the soul within had to be made visible to gain spiritual perfection. Alchemy was concerned with the souls of men just as the narrative of *Pericles* itself: the unenlightened or wounded man was signified by base metals such as copper or iron, whilst those of pure spirit were signified as gold. This process, of metaphorical alchemical purification, was meant to eliminate inner evils and corruption to give way to a rebirth within virtue and goodness, oftentimes called “New Birth” (Redgrove 9). This process allows Pericles to destroy the facade of nobility and virtue within the corrupted system of governance and replace it with realized nobility and virtue.
The tempest summoned by Pericles’ perturbation serves an important role both in the creation of alchemical rust upon Pericles’ “body” as well as that which brings him to where he may begin to return to a harmonious, balanced state. The possibility of this new birth is offered to Pericles in the form of the shipwreck: “The metal [of his father’s armor] descends into the depths of the sea and emerges again, offering Pericles an opportunity for transformation”, into a more virtuous form, the externalization of his infection changing from tempest to alchemical rust. The tempest is marked as a creation of male-aligned and violent elements, showing that Pericles mental perturbation is born of a similar kind of violence; “the wind … begins to blow” as “thunder above and deeps below” is a clash between fire and air, sending the water into a tumult (II.chorus.28-9). Once upon land, stripped of his identity due to dissolution, Pericles personally identifies the force which launched him into tempest as one of male power, “angry stars of heaven” (II.i.1). In contrast, he once more aligns himself with feminine powers as an “earthly man … that must yield to” the “wind, rain, and thunder” (II.i.2-3). He does, however, call upon both male and female elements as those who, in argument, used him as “the ball” in a game of “tennis” between “the waters and the wind” (II.i.61-2). So while Pericles viscerally connects himself to female-aligned elements, he also acknowledges the broader imbalance between the four, which becomes an emblematically violent conflict with one another. Caught in the middle and oppressed by uncontrolled male authority he feels he must protect, Pericles is driven from the path of a King by his perturbation. Unlike his father who sat as “the sun” for “princes … about his throne” as lesser “stars”, Pericles is only visible “in darkness”, with no fire visible “in light” (II.iii.43-7). He is, thusly, so deeply aligned with oppressed female powers that he becomes a nightly celestial body such as the moon - furthering a connection between himself and Diana, a link which will serve both his wife and daughter.
Conjunction

To create the *magnum opus* that will heal Pericles of his perturbation, two alchemical processes must be fulfilled: that of the *rex marinus* and that of the marriage and coupling of alchemical king and queen (fig. 3). To do so, Pericles must exit the *solve* of the ocean and join with a suitable queen, one of virtue and goodness, to help him realize these traits within his own kingdom and legacy. He comes to land, which serves as a symbol for *coagula* and a momentary cessation of the malleability of the bodily form, and is raised from rust by the gift of a marriage (Abraham 529). Conjunction was the step of alchemy which necessitated the introduction of a secondary metal or substance to the alembic in which the purification is taking place. This coming together, this union, would then produce something new; a “seed.”

Figure 3. Emblem 2, The alchemical king, also called the “red” king, meets the alchemical “white” queen. Their colors correspond to their connections to the sun/moon, and indicate their elemental association. From the *Rosarium Philosophorum* in *De Alchemia* vol. 2. Open source content from Transcendence Works.

For Marina to be quintessence, and able to purify others of their imperfections, this union must occur between two equals of authority, those tied to the highest of the celestial bodies. The
coming together of these equals implies a sort of reformation within patriarchal norms, necessitating both spouses respect and rely upon the other to maintain a virtuous and noble kind of authority. This balanced monarchy, born of alchemically feminist processes as it replaces a government corrupted by violating the female form, serves to allow women to have their bodies respected as well as their agency. These future spouses meet when the alchemical king, suffering within a tempest or within the wilderness, is saved by a beautiful woman, often signified with wings to emphasize her angelic and spiritual nature. This drowned king, this rex marinus, is muddied or dirtied in some way; this serves as an externalization of his inner turmoil, his “rust.” The alchemical queen, a being related to the element of earth and water and therefore able to both cleanse him and see underneath his rust to reveal the material truth of the man before her, saves this king, cleanses him, and garbs him with new robes (Abraham 530). This act fulfills the emblematic marriage of the two, who are then “chemically” wed. The alchemical king, who is signified by both gold and the sun, consummates this marriage with the alchemical queen, signified as silver and the moon, within the tempestuous aqua marina (Abraham 534, fig. 4). It is in this union that conjunction is fulfilled and the virgin stone, the magnum opus, is created. 

Figure 4. Emblem 5, the consummation of the chemical marriage of king and queen, from the Rosarium Philosophorum in De Aclehmia vol. 2. Open source content from Transcendence Works.
Pericles’ rusted ancestral armor serves as the externalization of his perturbation, made very real by the sea rusting the metal, and as such also serves as his body. Though he is pulled from the ocean by washing upon the rocks instead of saved by Thaisa, he has become dissociated from his body and self until he meets those within Pentapolis who are made immune to the many tempests that can be suffered upon it due to their allegiance to the ocean. The fishermen who offer Pericles hospitality and save his father’s armor, aligned with female elements as both submissive subjects and as characters aligned with goodness and virtue, are even capable of seeing the material truth of their kingdom. Pericles notes that they can “tell the infirmities of men, / And from their wat’ry empire recollect / All that may men approve or men detect” (II.i.51-3). Offering this wayward king a warm place to stay as well as assistance in participating in the tourney, they essentially draw him forth from his “wat’ry grave” (II.i.76). The effects of dissolution are immediately clear within Pericles as he introduces himself to these fishermen; he states, “What I have been I have forgot to know” - he has been, for now, successfully dissociated from his body, and therefore his identity (II.i.74). They dredge Pericles’ armor from the depths of the ocean, returning to him his memories and his self. Though reunited with his rusted body, Pericles has not experienced true union until he meets Thaisa.

Thaisa, as alchemical queen, has an innate ability to see through facade. From her introduction, Thaisa is aligned with the earth, the element that can perceive as well as obfuscate material reality. Simonides refers to her as “Beauty’s child, whom Nature gat” (II.ii.6). She is a beautiful child of nature, a stone of earthen metal made to be beloved, and capable of lesser regenerative deeds to match her status as alchemical queen. And with her alliance with earth, Thaisa is well versed in reading emblems, something that she passes on to Marina. In her reading of emblems, she can see the truth of the image and what it might imply for that which lies
missing or unsaid. The tourney for her birthday serves as an excellent tableau of her abilities: while she may be suitably impressed by each knight’s emblem, it is Pericles who she crowns victor of the day. She sees past his rusted armor and understands the meaning of his emblem “A withered branch that’s only green at top, / The motto: In hac spe vivo” (II.ii.45-6). She also comprehends the fact that he is of noble constitution despite his poor appearance. He calls to Thaisa with this earthen emblem, bringing attention to a branch which, while withered and without root or foundation, has still managed to produce a leafy top. This emblem nearly parallels Pericles’ own state: adrift, but still living, still hopeful. It is earth persisting in conditions that are unfriendly to it, continuing to grow, seeking to protect itself from further harm; it seeks, perhaps, the regeneration of water. The connection between earth and Pericles is furthered at the post-tourney feast by Thaisa, who considers Pericles “like diamond to glass” (II.iii.40). Unlike earth fired in a kiln until molten and mouldable, he is ascribed the visage of the minerals of the earth, compressed under an immensely oppressive weight, until emerging the hardest and most valuable gem. This foreshadows the upturn in Pericles long travail: while he may be under the weight of his flaw now, he will come out of it as a pure and noble substance.

Simonides, in his position as true king, operates as a narrative foil to Antiochus. He serves as a reminder of what a king is meant to be, ever ready with his advice on how to properly rule a kingdom. He is also capable of the feat of seeing the truth of the emblems before him, stating that “Opinion’s but a fool that makes us scan / The outward habit by the inward man” - he, as aligned with the sun in heaven, can also see through obfuscation and alchemical rust, treating Pericles as a noble guest despite his consistent suppression of the truth of his identity and the reason for his general melancholy (II.ii.58-9). Operating as a true king, and contributing to Pericles’ approaching coniunctio, Simonides presents the male elements in balance, and resists
the corruption of Antioch in his teachings. To him, “Princes in this / Should live like gods above, who freely give / To everyone that come to honor them. / And princes not doing so are like to gnats” (II.iii.63-6). In this, he constructs the proper way of things, in balance: like gods of air and fire, not base and annoying insects. Simonides’ construction of nobility is one of mutual respect and honorable treatment, and this is critical to Pericles’ own attainment of purity and kingship. Pericles likens him to the sun, further aligning him with the emblem of the alchemical king, about who lesser nobles are but stars in his presence. He notably appreciates Thaisa’s ambition to marry Pericles and her staunch denial of doing anything else, subverting the narrative incest present in Antioch. While Simonides’ rule invokes the presence of a virtuous heaven, Antiochus is punished for his transgressions with “A fire from heaven” (II.iv.9). That flame, created and fed through an unnatural lust, ultimately consumes Antiochus and his daughter; their punishment, before their people, is to be “shriveled up … even to loathing, for they so stunk / That all those eyes adored them … Scorn now their hand” (II.iv.9-11). The illusion of nobility is burned away by a force aligned with divinity and true kingship, the divine force of the narrative intervening for the first time to protect from further violence on part of the corrupted patriarchy. The collateral damage of this divinely wrought act implies a specific punishment for those who, even passively involved in corruption, are complicit in the violence of the system. Antiochus’ daughter tells no one of what her father does to her, and in doing so allows her father to kill scores of noble men seeking her hand in marriage. Her death also seems a mercy, as once the truth of their relationship is revealed, her prospects are nonexistent; the incest violates her body as well as her possibility for a future.

The particular wording by Gower in regards to the consummation of the royal marriage makes most sense when viewed as an alchemical process: two substances come together in a
union to form a “seed”. Once the marriage of Thaisa and Pericles is blessed by Simonides, a
dumbshow follows, which Gower narrates. Gower declares, “Hymen hath brought the bride to
bed, / Where, by the loss of maidenhead, / A babe is moulded”, language associated with
alchemy instantly present within the emblem of Marina’s conception (III.chorus.9-11). This
creation also emblematically occurs in the ocean signified within the emblem as well, as Marina
is birthed or realized within the aqua marina. She is also, critically, born amongst the chiding
elements - all four present, calling forth something new and powerful. This conjunction creates,
purifies, and regenerates through the emblem of the conjunction of alchemical king and queen,
and marks a turn in the narrative in which evil begins to be punished for its deeds and for truth to
begin to be revealed.

The conflict of elements needed for the opus occurs as Thaisa is in the throes of
childbirth - producing that creation of the union of king and queen, within the emblematically
important ocean. Pericles, after being finally located by his lords and informed of the death of
Antiochus and his daughter, reveals himself as a king and thus reveals a piece of the truth he has
suppressed; he agrees to return to his kingdom, bringing with him his heavily pregnant wife.
Their union summons the next step in the process of alchemical perfection: the birth of the new
“seed” and the putrefaction of one of the parents. Gower’s chorus opens the scene:

Their vessel shakes
On Neptune’s billow. Half the flood
Hath their keel cut. But Fortune, moved,
Varies again. The grizzled North
Disgorges such a tempest forth
That, as a duck for life that dives,
So up and down the poor ship drives. (III.chorus.44-50)

Pericles attempts to resist this conjunction of elements as Thaisa travails, demanding that:

The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,
Which wash both heaven and hell! And thou that hast
Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,
Having called them from the deep! O, still
Thy deaf’ning dreadful thunders, gently quench
Thy nimble sulfurous flashes. (III.i.1-6)

Though he has joined with Thaisa and has been cleansed, in part, of his rust, he still suffers
within perturbation in this tempest, and he equates this unlucky turn of fortune as a callback to
the entwined serpents, the storm “venomously” spitting at him (III.i.7). This draws forth his own
flaw, connecting it to his continuing misfortune, indicating he still has to heal; this union is not
enough to rectify his flaw. He still hides what he knows patriarchy can become, still complicit in
it by maintaining silence. Seeing his evocation of male gods as not accomplishing what he
wanted - he is still too far from heaven, still corrupted - he attempts to call upon a mother
goddess: “Lucina, O / Divinest patroness and midwife gentle / To those that cry by night, convey
thy deity / Aboard our dancing boat” (III.i.10-13). His prayers seemingly go unanswered,
however, as Thaisa “dies” in childbirth.

Putrefaction

For Marina to survive, a life had to be taken; “birth and generation were inextricably
linked with the death and putrefaction of the old ‘seed’ or ‘parent’” and so Thaisa falls into a
death-like sleep (Abraham 539). The alchemical process requires a perceived death. Just as
alchemists believed corn died within the earth to bring forth new life, so too does the alchemical
seed’s parent die, become treasure, and resurrect. This emblem, of the king resurrected within his
treasure-filled coffin upon the water, has been completely feminized by Shakespeare here, Thaisa
playing the part of regenerated substance so Pericles can continue to purify himself. Putrefaction
was not a permanent death nor even a permanent state within the alchemical process. It was
temporary, a step that occurred under cover of night to invoke the regenerative powers of the
female moon. In feminizing the emblem of the dead king, Shakespeare allows Thaisa to ascend
and become a perfect substance, that of the immutable position of Luna: the white queen, able to purify and regenerate on a lesser level than quintessence.

Marina’s birth was “a work of reconciliation between apparently incompatible opposites” which conclude as “a perfect unity” that “can not be broken” (Abraham 536, fig. 5). Lychorida, when bringing Pericles his infant daughter, uses language that interacts with this alchemical image of the “seed”, telling Pericles to “Take in your arms this piece / Of your dead queen” (III.i.17-8), emphasis added). Pericles is who ultimately associates the alchemical construction of the magnum opus with Marina’s birth: “Thou hast as chiding a nativity / As fire, air, water, earth, and heaven can make / To herald thee from the womb” (III.i.36-8). The birth within the ocean directly connects Marina to the opus within many alchemical texts as well as in name. The Sophic Hydrolith calls the opus a stone, but also mentions that it is more correct to refer to it as “the water of the Ocean”, and that it was a “water of life, the purest and most blessed water” (Waite 4). The Rosarium Philosophorum refers to the opus as the “juices of Lunaria”, aqua vitae, “Fifth Essence”, quintessence, and divine water (Jacobus 3). As this process involves the reconciling of that which is incompatible, it resolves as a fifth element, “quintessence”, which is “the physical equivalent of heaven, a virginal, eternal substance, an embodiment of truth and virtue” (Abraham 536). And as the substance which holds quintessence is so deeply aligned with water, the process of quintessence, of purification or perfection, also becomes aligned with water, furthering a connection to femininity.
Plato described the *magnum opus* as “a thing which hath not touched the fire, nor the fire touched it”, both declaring it a perfect, unassailable material as well as *virgin*. Quintessence, as a perfect unity, was also a unity of body, soul, and spirit; it implied an ability to evade violence or change, as it was immutability given form (Jacobus 2). Trismosin’s *Splendor Solis* describes the purification that the *magnum opus* is capable of as an act born of putrefaction, and through that putrefaction in water, the regenerated form is brought back to its state “of Greening and Growing”; it heals and resurrects (19). The water-based connections are critical to understanding Marina as quintessence, as she was born within *aqua marina* as well as named for it (fig. 6). She carries the endless possibilities of quintessence within her, born of the coming together of the alchemical king and queen, holding *aqua vitae* within her very soul. Marina utilizes her abilities to seek truth and purify others to defend her body against male violence and violation and this is
critical as Pericles is suppressing the truth of this violence; thus her usage of quintessence is to an alchemically feminist end.

To assist her in wielding this alchemically feminist power, Pericles blesses her in name and invocations of the gods: “Quiet and gentle thy conditions, for / Thou art the rudeliest welcome to this world / that ever was prince’s child … Now the good gods throw their best eyes upon ‘t” (III.i.33-41). Though still in the thick of both tempest and perturbation, Pericles resolves himself in the face of this tragedy, not allowing himself to be malleable in the face of oppression as he does at other points. He accepts the truth of Thaisa’s death, not knowing that what he perceives as truth is actually yet another illusion and unknowingly suppresses yet another truth. Here, he does “not fear the flaw” as it has already done “to [him] the worst” (III.i.43-4).

While Pericles aligns Marina with all elements, Thaisa is notably lacking elemental allegiance at the time of her giving birth: “A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear, / No light, no fire. Th’ unfriendly elements / Forgot thee utterly” (III.i.61-3). He places Thaisa’s body in a chest filled
with riches and has it caulked and thrown into the ocean, becoming a vessel which transcends life and death, the ambiguity of the contents of the chest make it a liminality - and in that liminality, all is possible, even reanimation (Abraham 539, fig. 7). With Thaisa’s fall into putrefaction, Pericles now must foster Marina for her to survive. “O, make for Tarsus!” He tells the captain, “There will I visit Cleon, for the babe / Cannot hold out to Tyrus. There I’ll leave it / At careful nursing” (III.i.82-5).

Many academics have pondered why Pericles leaves Marina at Tarsus for as long as he did, without ever seeing her; however, in the context of the alchemical emblems that accompany the creation of the *opus alchymicum*, it fits perfectly. The alchemical king and queen “lie dead or are absent” to allow the virgin stone to grow and learn under their foster parents care (Abraham 543). This situation allows for the child to test her skills against corrupt enemies and rise above oppression - something that she couldn’t accomplish without the conflict of a house separated from family.

Pericles continues the alignment of Marina with water as he passes her and Lychorida onto Cleon: “My gentle babe Marina, / Whom, for she was born at sea, I have named so”, within the “rage and roar” of a feral ocean (III.iii.13-6). She carries that feral water within herself, and that uncontained force, allied with Diana, which makes her an unapproachable island to those uninvited. Marina also is taught to better utilize her latent abilities through the “princely training” she’s given by Cleon (III.iii.19). Cleon, for his part, makes a vow to Pericles:
Cleon

Your Grace, that fed my country with your corn,
For which the people’s prayers still fall upon you,
Must in your child be thought on. If neglection
Should therein make me vile, the common body,
By you relieved, would force me to my duty. (III.iii.22-5)

He is held to this vow, ultimately, in allowing Marina to be “killed” by Leonine through his own incompetent leadership, assisting Dionyza in her attempted murder by suppressing the truth that it was no accident.

There was a purification within that tempest on the ocean - but it wasn’t of Pericles. It was of Thaisa, killed and revived within the *aqua marina*, saved by a representative of the gods to become a representative of the gods herself. In death she suffered separation from the body, a putrefaction which only produced treasure, and a reunion with body upon the shores of Ephesus. For Pericles, there is still a long road to walk, and many more tempestuous seas to travel.
Congelation

Though Pericles’ continues to suffer throughout the narrative, he is not subjected to the tumult of another oceanic tempest: in fact, he overcomes the next tempest his ship sails through, refusing to be submerged, marking his entrance into coagula. The remaining alchemical parent of the opus, who is now capable of beginning to reforge their own body, begins the process of congelation, or coagula. The body and soul remain separate as the body attempts to come together into its perfected form, the aqua marina cooling, the storm lessening, to allow this process to begin. With Marina stowed at Tarsus, Pericles can begin to attempt to take his place as a proper king. He still fails to do so, however, as he ultimately places the weight of his continuing flaw on Marina - relying, still, on patriarchal norms, externalizing his flaw as long, uncut hair, to remain that way until Marina marries. The primary reason that he is still incapable of ruling and creating a balanced system of kingship is due to this continue reliance upon the female body not as equal but as object, as well as his continued inability to see truth. His ultimate regeneration will lie in acknowledging the power latent in Marina - “in pace / Another Juno” - and respecting both that power and the body that holds it as well as allowing her to show him material truth (V.i.111).

Marina’s status as quintessence and noble princess allows her broad authority over virtue, goodness, and regeneration - and those virtues call into the narrative the protective influence of the goddess Diana. While in Tarsus, she is taught by Cleon the noble arts expected of her station: “music, letters ... gained / Of education all grace / Which makes high both the art and place / Of general wonder”, and becomes able to perform and create at a high degree of perfection, indicative of her nobility and quintescent soul (IV.chorus.7-11). This kind of perfect influence and grasp of noble skills brings its own enemies seeking to snuff that light out, to keep
corruption and the power it wields within the land. The infection of toxic masculinity is still rife within the narrative, finding a new host: Dionyza, who is complicit in the violence of the patriarchal system.

The secondary conflict of *Pericles* resides in the corruption of motherhood in the face of greed, as well as the way government suppresses the truth of its violent actions. Dionyza, meant to be a stand-in mother for Marina, turns to wickedness when Marina proves more talented and beautiful than her biological daughter and Cleon, passive, allows this to culminate in the violent plot for Marina’s life. Dionyza as holder and agent of toxic masculinity operates similarly to Antiochus. Marina threatens her own authority as Pericles had threatened Antiochus’, her virtues pulling attention away from her own daughter and therefore the possibility of a good marriage and, therefore, her own legacy. She was taken by “that monster envy, oft the wrack / Of earned praise” ultimately seeking to take “Marina’s life ... by treason’s knife”, believing that the best way to reassert her own legacy, and to protect her authority, is to rely upon the violence so easily acquired within the patriarchal system of monarchy (IV.chorus.12-4). Her language, of violent air and fire, also falls into line with Antiochus. Moral Gower as narrator refers to her plot with an association to pregnancy, highlighting the ways she has corrupted motherhood - “the pregnant instrument of wrath” and “the unborn event” (IV.chorus.44-5). While this emphasis of motherhood serves to underscore how Thaisa serves as a foil to Dionyza - who, in absentia, is still a mother and a virtuous one at that - Dionyza’s language is still that of the male-aligned elements made into weaponry, driving home the correlation between elemental violence and corrupt government. She consistently connects emotion and the emotions of others as something born of fire. Her greed, as emotion, lays alive within her chest, even as she tells Leonine: “Let not conscience, / Which is but cold in flowing, thy bosom inflame / Too nicely” (IV.i.4-6). She is
also capable of turning air into a weapon, such as when she tells Marina: “O’er the sea marge / Walk with Leonine. The air is quick there, / And it pierces and sharpens the stomach” (IV.i.28-30). This tendency for utilizing violent male-aligned imagery is only present within the villains of this narrative, thus cementing the connection between her and the infection of corrupt patriarchy. Dionyza’s double entendre seeks to obfuscate the truth of her motivation - that she seeks Marina’s death.

While Marina’s powers lie in the purification of this corruption, the purification does not necessitate nonviolence in the face of attempted bodily violation - it is for love of Marina and her father that the people of Tarsus revenge their suffering upon their leaders, her influence and the influence of her father indirectly purifying Tarsus. Marina opposes Dionyza’s fire/air influence as a perfect balance of all elements. She is familiar with “Tellus” her her “weed”, earthen nature sustained by the sun of fire and air and purified water; she was also “Born in a tempest” of colliding elements, the world “a lasting storm” of water, air, and fire (IV.i.15-21). Her alignment with the four elements symbolically carries that balance into Tarsus, protecting it from another famine born of fire. She is also directly aligned with divinity through her introduction and her birth, having been born under Diana’s protection as well as a devout member of her cult. The pure substance of quintessence, of the infant stone, becomes a servant of Diana who “with rich and constant pen” constantly writes “Vail to her mistress Dian” and “never spake bad word, nor did ill turn / To any living creature” (IV.chorus.28-9, IV.i.86-7). Her alignment to Diana, just as her mother’s, ultimately helps to protect her life and body.

Citation

The constant invocation of a mother goddess, of Diana, follows alchemical conventions within the narrative. Diana serves as that which protects Marina and ultimately gifts Pericles the
final member of his family back to him; just like the alchemical queen, she is tied to earth and water. Diana serves as the tangible, divine force of *Pericles*, beginning with her ferrying of Thaisa’s casket to Ephesus and continuing into protecting Marina as she’s “rescued” from the shores of Tarsus and forced to make her way in the “wild” of Mytilene. Diana is a goddess distilled from a collection of mother goddesses that were worshipped in Greece, Rome, and Anatolia (Hart 347-8). Of this group, which includes Juno, Hera, and Isis, Diana is the combination of two goddesses in particular: the Grecian Artemis and the Anatolian Cybele (Hart 348). So central was she to the mother goddesses of the ancient pantheons that Rome referred to her as the “*Magna Mater*”, a protector and mother not only of mothers, but of empires (Hart 348). Diana’s name was well-known throughout the Renaissance world: she is present in the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to Timothy, in subsequent church sermon, in mythological dictionary and anti-demonology tract, in Ovid, and in translations of Greco-Roman romances popular with Elizabethan audiences. The location most often connected with her cult is that of Ephesus, considered within apocryphal biblical text to be where the Virgin Mary retired after the death and resurrection of Christ (Hart 350-1). Across multiple religions, Ephesus came to invoke the image of the divine mother; and not only a mother, but a mother closely related to virginal deities. Diana’s priestesses become vestal in their worship and her priests prove their devotion to bodily purity through castration; their worship is an attempt to communicate across the primordial gap between the sensuous earth and water and the super-sensuous heaven - to call to the spirit of a higher power in hopes that it might elevate their own souls to heaven.

Pericles’ ruling in Tyre alone, his rule absent from the narrative as he still fails to manage proper rulership, unaware of Thaisa’s soul is called back to her on her behalf by Cerimon. Citation is the unvoiced call to the soul as it lies in wait within the *aqua marina*. The body,
beginning to take its purifying shape within the waters, seeks reunion with the soul, hoping to prove itself fit to house it. This act of citation was made easily possible by Thaisa’s already present connection to mother goddesses who protect mothers and the process of unity and rebirth, having in past invoked Diana, Cynthia, and Juno. Her ascension to vestal priestess and representative of Diana occurs upon water much like Pericles’ regeneration at Mytilene, though her vessel upon the sea is her casket of “spices” and “jewels”, her body kept pleasant even in perceived death. Cerimon remarks after opening the chest washed ashore at Ephesus, “Soft! It smells most sweetly in my sense” (III.i.70-1, III.ii.71).

Cerimon is capable of regeneration as an educated man who “studied physic” and the “secret art” of alchemy, which taught him “the blessed infusions / That dwells in vegetives, in metals, stones” and of the “disturbances / That Nature works, and of his cures” (III.ii.32-42). He, like Pericles before his wounding, is skilled at seeing beyond that which is obvious - which allows him to see that Thaisa is still able to be saved. Thaisa also later describes Cerimon as a man “Through whom the gods have shown their power, that can, / From first to last resolve you”, highlighting his connection to a balanced world and the way that balance can regenerate others (V.iii.71-3). We also note his alliance with goodness through his mastery of these earthen substances, as well as his assertion that “Virtue and cunning were endowments greater / Than nobleness and riches” (III.ii.30-1). He is a man above the lure of greed, and as he has a grasp of the balance between elements, he’s ultimately capable of this minor feat of regeneration, such as awakening Thaisa from her coma - backed, of course, by the goddess Diana who Thaisa serves as vestal.

Thaisa’s reanimation draws on the alchemical emblem of the king buried at sea, realigned to womanhood and the symbol of the mother, thus aligning one of the important alchemical
emblems of putrefaction to femininity, assisting in the creation of alchemical feminism. It also mirrors Pericles’ return to Tyre without balance, as Cerimon brings Thaisa into balance with “the fire of life” kindled once more against “the o’erpressed spirits” and the earthen association of being buried countered by giving her “air” (III.ii.95-104). As she wakes, she’s once again associated with earth and water in balance, her eyes “The diamonds of a most praised water doth / Appear to make the world twice rich”, that made within the earth and aligned with water (III.ii.116-7). Her first words upon awakening is an invocation of her patron goddess Diana - “O dear Diana!” - thus calling back to the godly force which chose her as avatar and protected her life (III.ii.120). Cerimon’s assistance helps her take her position among the “vestal livery” at Diana’s Temple, where she waits, stagnant just as Pericles in Tyre, awaiting her reunion with husband and daughter.

Thaisa uses Diana when invoking her agency, backing her goals with divine power and relying upon this strong, godly female power to empower her. Thaisa’s connection to Diana begins within her plea to her father to allow her to marry him. In the application of her agency, Thaisa promises to “wear Diana’s livery” should she not be able to marry Pericles, making her vow “by the eye of Cynthia” and swearing “on her virgin honor” not to break it (II.v.9-11). She holds to this promise in Ephesus - seeing no way to reach her husband, she takes up the veil and becomes a vestal priestess. She invokes the names of the same amalgamated goddess - Diana, the goddess who stands upon the nexus of nature and the moon. She doubly relates herself to the moon in this vow and therefore, more broadly, to the ocean as both subject and authority. Her position allows her to become a stand-in for Diana until the goddess herself descends upon Pericles - she is vestal and mother both, straddling the divide over which Diana herself is the authority.
Thaisa serves as a character foil to Dionyza; while she stands as the virtuous and noble mother and dedicated vestal priestess, Dionyza corrupts the motherhood she accepted to take on through her attempt to have Marina killed. This corruption is born of her greed for a good marriage for her daughter, despite knowing the truth of the foster arrangement: that Marina would soon be gone and far from any prospects that her daughter might meet. Even though she knows this truth, she continues with her act of violence; for her, it is not enough that Marina leave, she must perish entirely. While she doesn’t include her husband in her planning, likely knowing he would disallow it, he is all the same implicated when the attempted crime occurs: he has, essentially, been usurped as governor by his own wife, his authority used for violent ends. And instead of revealing the truth of Marina’s death to Pericles, he allows it to remain suppressed so that he might attempt to recapture his authority. In this, they bring upon their family revenge, their corruption of their government bringing about their ultimate doom. Cleon and Dionyza die similar to Antiochus and his daughter: they are purified through fire, and not only the instigator of violence is punished, but her whole family. However, instead of their death coming at the hands of divine authority, theirs come from the very people over which they ruled. The whole family, implicated in the act by their tacit silence, are killed by the citizens who consider Pericles to be the man who saved their kingdom from death, and therefore their true king.

Just as she’s able to read into the truth of the soul of Leonine, that he has “a gentle heart” even in the face of her possible murder, Marina is able to read situations as Pericles can’t: with optimism, knowing that it will be alright (IV.i.97). In this, citation shows itself through Marina’s struggles. Her soul - which, as the virgin stone, is capable of great feats and is impossible to truly capture - calls out not to her body but to that divine authority that protects and guides her as
patroness of her gift of quintessence: Diana. Though odd, Marina is plucked from the hands of death by pirates - and though these pirates sell her in Mytilene as a prostitute, she refers to the whole scene as a rescue: “A crew of pirates came and rescued me, / Brought me to Mytilene” (V.i.205-6). She doesn’t even refer to her deliverance unto Mytilene as being sold; she seems to understand from the moment it occurs that this is her entrance into the wilderness, adrift, but protected by her patron goddess.

Sublimation

Marina is the hero of Pericles, and as such, her journey differs from male-dominated romance; through these differences, alchemical feminism shines. Female protagonists follow a different path with different goals. In Osborn’s overview of traditional, chivalric, male-centered romance, the plot begins with a call to action which necessitates a journey through hostile territory, where he meets with a damsel or beloved woman, and the narrative concludes with a battle against “overwhelming odds or a monstrous opponent” (Osborn 15). The female-centered romantic adventure is a struggle to overcome those who “attempt to subjugate, rape, or even slay her” and her journey becomes a quest to “retain control over her body” as well as to find a place to call home where that is possible (Osborn 6). The general form of the violence she seeks to flee is the threat of incest or death, and to escape she enters into the wilderness of sea or forest (Osborn 9). Marina correctly identifies her capture by pirates as an escape from Dionyza’s murderous ways, and knows that she is being protected by her divine patron. The force which protects the woman as she enters the wilderness is “the Goddess”, an “entity” which is both a “protective and empowering” virtue for these threatened women (Osborn ix-x). Upon the wild sea, the virgin flees violation and violence, protected by the Goddess in her attempts to defend her and her virtue. They’re allowed to take “control over their lives by the end”, their ultimate
marriage to a good man not denying this agency but highlighting it as they’ve continued to thrive outside the familial unit (Osborn 18).

The divine force that protects Marina is that of the Goddess Diana, connected to her through her religious devotion and through Thaisa’s position as vestal priestess. Marina’s “wild” is the island of Mytilene, and her entrance into it is marked by her theft/rescue by pirates. Osborn’s conception of the wild requires forest or ocean, through which the adrift virgin is guided by godly intervention. The name of Mytilene, however, aligns itself with water - ocean - and alchemy: sounding much like “metalline”, it ascribes to itself a form: that of the substance to be moulded and, as an island, existing within the ocean. Mytilene is an untamed wild, an unshaped and impure metal. This makes Marina’s entrance into this “wild” of the brothel and her invocation of Diana clandestine - they both serve to summon forth that divine force meant to protect the female body as well as indicate that Mytilene is Marina’s obstacle to overcome by an application of her quintessence.

Mytilene is a location rife with violent male imagery and actions which apply that violent image upon the female elements and body through speech. Bawd, another woman aligned with male violence, objectifies other women as “stuff” that, due to their use, would not be able to withstand the male “strong wind”; in fact, they are so “well-used” that this wind will “blow it to pieces” (IV.ii.17-20, emphasis mine). The particular usage of pronoun here further objectifies the women of the brothel, and simultaneously invalidates the suffering of these women by making them objects. They are “pitifully sodden”, and this treatment of women sets the tone of Mytilene in Act IV: sex workers are dehumanized, made objects for male consumption (represented by “strong wind”) and for the profit of those aligned with male-violation, and these women are aligned deeply with contained waters; these waters, contained to tubs, attempt to cure the
venereal infections forced upon and within these women through their work, the disease externalizing the effect of patriarchal violence. They are perfect examples of those who yearn for alchemical feminism: for a purification of their society on their behalf that would allow them to be free.

The dynamic between these contained sex workers and the uncontained Marina reveals a particular pair of significations regarding water that directly correlate to alchemical feminism and the female opus. While the sex workers represent a specific kind of water, which is “contained and passive … and thus desirable”, Marina in resisting this containment, is untethered and “feral” (Hayman 25-30). According to Ruth Hayman, feral water is devalued by male authority, as it's impossible to contain, impossible to colonize like the “virgin territories” explored by naval explorers of the Renaissance. Feral waters in Pericles operate on behalf of the Goddess to protect the female body; it does so by making itself the force which purifies and perfects Pericles of his infection by corrupt patriarchal power and urges him to reveal truth.

Marina, born and aligned with feral waters, is similarly impossible to contain. It is an alchemically feminist force, that which would read easily as a virtue to the early modern audience, and which completely resists containment. The owners of the brothel mistake Marina for another woman easily contained and bent to the form that they desire: they fail to see that she is untamed and wild, born as a kind of emblem of truth, virtue, and regenerative power. They learn too late that the magnum opus is a material that cannot be chained, bent, or altered: it is immutable, and as such, so is Marina, and in her ability to deny imprisonment she gains immense authority.

The brothel’s attempts to contain women is born of a greed for capital made off the lust of men; it becomes the obstacle that Marina must overcome utilizing her abilities. The owners of
the brothel, Bawd in particular as de facto leader and madam, attempts to enforce her authority
over Marina by objectifying her as the earth, “Come, you’re a young / foolish sapling, and must
be bowed as I would / have you” (IV.ii.87-90). She also refers to Marina as “that which grows to
the stalk, / never plucked yet” further enforcing a violence upon earthen imagery (IV.vi.41-2).
She subverts the previous usages of these elements as empowering, protective, and regenerative
by making them mere objects to be altered as she sees fit, to make them desirable to patriarchal
desire. In Bawd’s world, both water and earth have no authority and have no use aside from that
which can be used to further objectify women - to be bent or to be contained and submerged.
Marina counters this violence by denying a foothold to the male violation of Mytilene and the
women aligned willingly with it by calling on Diana: “If fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters
deep, / Untied I still my virgin knot will keep. / Diana aid my purpose!” (IV.ii.151-3). Marina
aligns herself with the force of alchemical feminism and to the fifth element of quintessence or,
as Pericles refers to it at her birth, “heaven”. Quintessence is heavenly, and is therefore
summoned by heavenly forces: Diana serves as goddess and protectoress of Marina, and as such
is represented in Marina’s speech when she is utilizing her quintessence to an alchemically
feminist end.

Marina’s purification of Mytilene is radical and far-reaching - by the time she’s freed
from the brothel, the very perception of women has been changed from used to useful. The men
who enter are tainted with a cruel view of women as object and leave with the understanding that
they offer something far more valuable to society than a simple warm body:

Second Gentleman  No, no. Come, I am for no more
bawdy houses. Shall ‘s go hear the vestals sing?
First Gentleman  I’ll do anything now that’s virtuous,
but I am out of the road of rutting forever. (IV.v.6-9)
These “gentlemen” leave the brothel which serves as the emblem of the objectification of women in Mytilene, to go to the temple, which is directly aligned through Thaisa and Diana to regenerative, divine, and purifying femininity. That which a woman can offer becomes not her body, but that which she creates: art, dance, and song, all things beautiful, revered, and sustainable, held within the symbol of the vestal priestess.

In turning the brothel-going population into a temple-going population, Marina has raised the importance of virtue within Mytilene. Emblematically, virtue is tied to escaping harm or death; it is also a force of regeneration and purity, reflecting a transcendental change in the body. As this change in perception - from lust to virtue - reflects a change in the perception of the women of Mytilene, virtue must be aligned with the force of alchemical feminism working through Marina’s quintessence. Wickedness is the tain within each of the three narrative conflicts that drives antagonists to violate women; thus, virtue becomes shorthand for a resistance to this violation and marks whether a character is heroic, which is significant as it denotes a return to a balanced form of government when these characters attain power. As Pericles says in his aside after understanding Antiochus’ riddle, “he’s no man on whom perfections wait / That, knowing sin within, will touch the gate” - perfection relates to virtue as well as alchemical purification; once the body is stripped of its “sin”, it denies that sin another chance to infect it (I.i.81-2). Pericles also associates true manliness with denying corruption in the form of violating or harming women; to be a man, to be a true king, is to not “touch the gate” of corrupted substances, to deny that kind of character flaw to ever take hold within himself. The men who refuse to return to the brothel accomplish the same: they improve themselves and their community for good.
Once the corrupt body has been cleansed, virtue replaces it; the transcendental aspect of alchemy calls for a close relationship with heaven, and the god present in *Pericles* is one preoccupied wholly with women: Diana. A turn towards “anything … that’s virtuous” is to deny violent male authority and accept a powerful female deity. It denies the possibility of profiting off the violation of the female body, and as such Bawd opposes this as well as the force of quintessence that Marina holds. She wishes to reaffirm her authority and her ability to gain capital derived from oppressing other women through her role as abusive patriarchal ally. She rails against Marina and, more broadly, the divinity altering Mytilene to an alchemically feminist society:

*Bawd*

Fie, fie upon her! She’s able to freeze the god Priapus and undo a whole generation.

… She would make a puritan of the devil if he should cheapen a kiss of her. (IV.vi.3-10)

Her solution is to attempt to corrupt her just as she is, asking Bolt to “crack the glass of her virginity, and make the rest / malleable” (IV.vi.149-50). This image operates emblematically as well, as the divine water was often signified within a corked alembic. Marina resists this containment in her alignment with feral waters, however, and thus cannot be cracked, nor can she become easily mouldable earth:

*Bolt*  
An if she were a thornier piece of ground than she is, she shall be plowed. (IV.vi.151-2)

Due to their lack of virtue, Bawd and Bolt fail to see the truth: that Marina is that which cannot be “moulded” or made “malleable” or “plowed” into place. She was created in a unity of that which is usually “chiding” with one another, a reconciliation of differences, a balance - and was born as a perfect and unchangeable substance as a result.
Bolt is moved from his purpose by Marina showing another talent from her status as quintessence: the production of gold from the act of purification.

Marina
Here, here’s gold for thee.
That thy master would gain by me,
Proclaim that I can sing, weave, sew, and dance,
With other virtues which I’ll keep from boast,
And will undertake all these to teach. (IV.vi.187-191)

This gold acts as the agent which frees her from the brothel: both the ultimately pure substance as well as the most profitable, Marina has proven to corrupt influences that respecting the bodies of women can be profitable. This, in addition to the purification of Lysimachus, essentially rids Mytilene of male violence, and the holders of that force of violence - Pander, Bawd, and Bolt - are never seen again to reflect that change.

Fermentation

The purification of Lysimachus and Pericles parallel each other in an intriguing way, as like Pericles in Antioch, Lysimachus is a rising monarch vulnerable to corruption. While Pericles is unwittingly corrupted by the suppression of truth, Lysimachus allows himself to be corrupted as he comes to believe the lie that frequenting a brothel is part of what makes a man. The purification of Lysimachus is critical because of this status as naive and rising monarch, but also because Marina senses within him possibility. She can see the noble core of his being, and in it foresees a possible future for herself, just as Lysimachus sees in her once he’s cleansed and his city rectified. Both instances of purification, of Pericles and Lysimachus, are given time to work through on stage, the process gentle and patient. It requires subtle interactions between Marina and her target, as she introduces questions to be pondered over and answered, and those answers represent the fermented body taking its perfected state.
Lysimachus’ speech is prose at first instead of blank verse, indicating his current corrupted and base state as it matches that of Bawd or Bolt. Marina matches this speech - and as she slowly returns to verse, Lysimachus mirrors her, symbolically raising him from corruption:

*Lysimachus* Why, the house you dwell in proclaims you to be a creature of sale.

*Marina* Do you know this house to be a place of such resort, and will come into ‘t? I hear say you’re of honorable parts and are the governor of this place. (IV.vi.79-83)

Marina calls to the “honorable parts” that lie deeply within him, urging him to remember his noble soul and his similarly noble station. A good and honorable leader would not “know” the brothel as he does, nor willingly go into it. In this challenge she also resists being dehumanized as a “creature of sale”, being neither “creature” nor allowing herself to be sold. She is ultimately attempting to get Lysimachus to recognize that should he continue this act, he will sully his own rule and make the possibility for his own legacy impossible.

*Lysimachus* Why, your herbwoman, she that sets seeds and roots of shame and iniquity. O, you have heard something of my power, and so stand aloof for more serious wooing. But I protest to thee, pretty one, my authority shall not see thee, or else look friendly upon thee. Come, bring me to some private place. Come, come.

*Marina* If you were born to honor, show it now; If put upon you, make the judgment good That thought you worthy of it. (IV.vi.87-96)

Lysimachus refers to Bawd utilizing the earth-aligned imagery that she views as mouldable to her will and characterizes earth not only as an oppressed womanly body but a *corrupted* body. Bawd is a character aligned with corrupting other women, a snake in the grass, and as Dionyza she represents how women can allow, support, and advance patriarchal violence to happen so long as they see a profit within it. Lysimachus mentions Bawd in a way that seeks to justify his appearance at the brothel, as he was told this is what men do, not only by complicit men but also
complicit women. Paired with this reminder of the corruption of Mytilene is the existence of his “authority” which he seeks to shed when visiting the brothel. Marina continues to challenge him on this, still calling to his soul, telling him that if he has authority, and is therefore of noble blood, he must show it in deed and not simply in name. His response indicates that she has finally reached him as he says, “How’s this? How’s this? Some more. Be sage”, allowing Marina to continue to secure her own future as well as Lysimachus’:

Marina  For me  
That am a maid, though most ungentle Fortune  
Have placed me in this sty, where, since I came,  
Diseases have been sold dearer than physic -  
That the gods  
Would set me free from this unhallowed place,  
Though they did change me to the meanest bird  
That flies i’ the purer air! (IV.vi.97-105)

Invoking the gods and the “purer air” of male nobility, Marina attempts to instill in Lysimachus the balance of a true monarch, that which seeks balance between noble air and pure fire. She also counters this godly nobility with the reminder of her body and self as a “maid”, that which is balance between water and earth itself, and seeks to, in turn, be balanced by Lysimachus’ air and fire.

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 altered it. Hold, here’s gold for thee.  
Persevere in that clear way thou goest  
And the gods strengthen thee!  
… For me, by you thoughten  
That I came with no ill intent, for to me  
The very doors and windows savor vilely.  
Fare thee well. Thou art a piece of virtue,  
And I doubt not by thy training hath been noble.  
Hold, here’s more gold for thee.  
A curse upon him, die he like a thief,  
That robs thee of thy goodness! If thou dost
Hear from me, it shall be for thy good. (IV.vi.106-22)

As a process of alchemical purification, Marina produces gold from her act of cleansing. She is able to completely alter Lysimachus’ mind from corruption, and in doing so allows Marina to herself from the brothel: she has produces money from virtue and not vice, altering not only the perceptions of the men who have interacted with her but also the way in which women in Mytilene are valued. By lifting the veil of male violation, Lysimachus sees the brothel for what it is - a location rife with “ill intent” and vile thought, where goodness is stolen by thieves and sold and where the gods are rarely present. Lysimachus’ purification is critical to Marina’s possible future - not only as he who can open the door and set her free, but also as a future monarch; she understands his heart and believes, from that understanding, that he is capable of becoming a noble man. She is thusly securing both of their futures.

With Lysimachus freed from the corruption of the brothel, virtue has been restored to Mytilene through him has leader and representative. This creates a city in which Marina is free to maintain her virtue and instill it in others - creating the possibility of female freedom underneath a primarily male rule. This purification allows Lysimachus to rule properly and to seek balance with an equal partner and queen, which he comes to seek in Marina.

_Lysimachus_
She’s such a one that, were I well assured
Came of a gentle kind and noble stock,
I’d wish no better choice, and think me rarely wed. -
Fair one, all goodness that consists in beauty:
Expect even here, where is a kingly patient,
If that thy prosperous and artificial feat
Can draw him but to answer thee in aught,
Thy sacred physic shall receive such pay
As thy desires can wish. (V.i.75-83)

He has discovered something new in Marina: a possible partner to rule at his side, for which he needs a noblewoman. It’s clear in the way he talks to and about her even before knowing she is
in fact noble that he views her with awe and respect, deferring to her in matters involving
corruption. This respect proves felicitous, as well, as it reunites her with her father and “kingly
patient” who was “driven before the winds” to arrive at Mytilene (V.chorus.14).

Similar to Lysimachus, Pericles is a vulnerable monarch, not because he is a rising king
such as he was in Antioch, but because he believes his possibility for legacy has ended before its
time; he perceives his own kingship as a failure. Marina relies upon her powers of speech and
persuasion, born of quintessence, to cure Pericles of his long-held and festering wound. In the
grips of this infection of male violence, Pericles pushes Marina away from him, sparking that
dialogue which can bring him from his grief and make his wounded body whole once more:

Marina She speaks,
My lord, that may be hath endured a grief
Might equal yours, if both were justly weighed.
… if you did know my parentage,
You would not do me violence. (V.i.97-111)

Marina begins by chastising Pericles - he is a king, and an alchemical king at that, and his innate
nobility should dictate he not do harm to an innocent, especially a virtuous maiden. She also
asserts her own nobility in the same move - she places herself as an equal to him, not only in
“parentage” but in “grief”. This claim prompts Pericles to ask, “You’re like something that -
what countrywoman? / Here of these shores?” (V.i.115-6). He begins to see the truth in her
likeness to Thaisa - allowing Marina to force him to further contemplate her existence to begin to
heal. She then complicates her existence, building upon personal mythos that Pericles would
identify as familiar to his own life and to his own child:

Marina No, nor of any shores.
Yet I was mortally brought forth, and am
No other than I appear. (V.i.117-9)
Unlike how Marina refers to her birth to Leonine as an event driven by the mortal power of men, of sailors in a test of endeavor and skill, here she uses mythological imagery. She was “brought forth” upon no shore, drawing upon that emblem created by Dionysa of “Thetis’ birth-child” which marked her as a force seeking to “o’erflow” the earth (IV.iv.40-1). This divorces Marina from the solidity of earth and paints her as an inhuman creature of the gods. Pericles immediately compares her to Thaisa, declaring Marina “in pace / Another Juno”, carrying forth that godly imagery into the rest of their conversation, allowing an inlet for Diana and for quintessence.

This marks where Pericles begins to feel as though he may finally capture the truth which has eluded him, the answer hidden this whole time. He begs answers from Marina that she evades with, “If I should tell my history, it would seem / Like lies disdained in the reporting” (V.i.134-5). Pericles, however, is ready to see the truth and to become a truly virtuous man:

*Pericles*

Falseness cannot come from thee, for thou lookest
Modest as Justice, and thou seemest a palace
For the crowned Truth to dwell in. (V.i.137-9)

He, much like Lysimachus, is at this point able to observe that Marina is a holder of some divine force that he has thus far been unable to wield or understand. Marina, as the fifth element, houses and reveals truth as air and earth and demands Justice as fire and water. For Pericles she is able to reveal the most critical of truths: that his legacy has survived. This truth is also connected deeply to revealing the truth of the corruption possible in the current system of patriarchal government as it reveals the way truth is suppressed, it allows the government to evolve into one more equal, all born of alchemical feminism. Marina continues to deflect until Pericles invokes a gendered perception of grief, pointing out how they both have transcended their particular expected models for grief:
Pericles
If thine considered prove the thousand part
Of my endurance, thou art a man, and I
Have suffered like a girl. (V.i.155-7)

Here, Pericles has understood a universal truth, that which lies at the core of alchemical feminism: that those preoccupied with aligning themselves with patriarchal constructions of monarchy will find themselves incapable of proper kingship and handling their mental perturbations. Both men and women are punished under violent patriarchy for failure to comply and even when complying by assisting the violence; violent patriarchal monarchy is a no-win societal contract. As Marina is in perfect balance, and as such is capable of understanding that even within an event which could easily be perceived as tragedy, and that there is a broader plan on part of a benevolent deity. Seeing now that Pericles can handle a revelation of the truth, which sits opposite to that which he has believed, she agrees to his request of her name. In giving her name, she submerges Pericles in a watery regeneration fueled by quintessence - and overseen by Diana.

While Marina’s name is a moment of revealed truth, it is not the singular moment where Pericles emerges from his crucible into exaltation - he requires assurances that this truth is, in fact, truth. Despite him knowing that Marina is incapable of lies, he at first believes Marina sent “by some incensèd god … / To make the world laugh” at him (V.i.164-6). He also demands she provide a reassurance that she’s “flesh and blood” and “not fairy” - begging for the reality that Marina represents, and not a continuing godly joke as he falsely believes his life to be (V.i.180-1). Marina provides him this grounding by relating her story, naming those involved, and proving that her alleged death was just that - alleged and untrue, each name proving to be yet another revelation, and this revelation is that which purified Pericles. It is here that Pericles calls for Helicanus, who he knows is similarly capable of seeing through falsehood and understanding
truth. At first, Pericles demands, “Strike me, honored sir. / Give me a gash, put me to present pain”, struggling still against the healing wound of patriarchal violence and seeking, for a moment, that which he understands better than regeneration (V.i.224-5). However, he immediately follows this momentary request with female-aligned elemental imagery:

*Pericles*

Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me  
O’erbear the shores of my mortality  
And drown me with their sweetness. (V.i.226-8)

He imagines himself as the earth meeting the ocean, where the tides endless rolling under Diana’s moon breaks down all things in time. It is this moment where he has entered exaltation - his body and soul in harmony, a subversion of the incestual corruption of Antioch.

**Exaltation**

As soon as Marina confirms her mother’s name, Pericles emerges from his fourteen year crucible, healed of his wound. This healing is externalized by Pericles putting on “fresh garments” and “robes” (V.i.247-56, figure 8). “O, come hither,” Pericles says to Marina, “Thou that beget’st him that did thee beget, / Thou that was’t born at sea, buried at Tarsus, / And found at sea again!” (V.i.228-31). This moment mirrors that riddle at Antioch, changing the inversion of family roles into a positive regeneration of self. Marina is not feasting “On Mother’s flesh” nor is Pericles playing a role other than wounded father, though he has been born anew through Marina. This also serves as the climactic moment for Marina’s authority, altering the monarchical system to one which values women and their contributions. Marina’s actions and powers of purification gift her with a special kind of authority; she has restored a monarch, which could be viewed as restoration of that system so easily corrupted at Antioch. However, this would deny the change she has created not only in her father but in Mytilene. Once a kingdom weighed down by a reliance upon violating the bodies of women, Marina cured the
patrons of their toxic belief that they were entitled to the womanly body and altered their valuation of women from that to that which they could create. Reading alchemically, we may also hope given the permanent exit of Pander, Bawd, and Bolt from the narrative that their corresponding violence has similarly exited, allowing for a system of partnership between King and Queen, and not only within Mytilene, but throughout the world.

Figure 8. Emblem 20: The Resurrection of the king, from the *Rosarium Philosophorum* in De Alchemia vol. 2. The accompanying motto is: “After my passion and manifold torments I am again risen, / Being purified and cleansed from all spots.” Open source content from Transcendence Works.

As proof of this finally solved monarchical imbalance between fire and air, Diana appears before Pericles to bless him, deeming him a true king capable of seeing and confessing truth. She finally allows him to completely grasp that which he has never understood: that his life is not tragedy or doom - it has simply been awaiting great change. Diana summons Pericles through “heavenly music” which puts him to sleep, and it is through this dreamscape that he learns that he must travel to Ephesus (V.i.267). To prove his devotion and his newly balanced self he must
offer a sacrifice to Diana, and completing this devotional task, this long pilgrimage, rewards him
with his long-lost other half - Thaisa. Much like his reunion with Marina, Pericles reconnects to
Thaisa through speech instead of appearance. As a parallel to Marina’s method of healing
through life story, so too Pericles retells his tale of woe and triumph, calling out to an
unsuspecting Thaisa:

Pericles
I here confess myself the King of Tyre,
Who, frightened from my country, did wed
At Pentapolis the fair Thaisa. (V.iii.2-4)

Pericles has reconciled himself with the system of kingship that was so deeply ruined in the
narrative, giving him an opportunity to “confess” his name and truth. Just as Marina naming
herself and Thaisa became the moment Pericles was healed of his grief, Thaisa is healed by
Pericles, proving himself able to wield the force of alchemical feminism. With an exclamation of
“O royal Pericles!” Thaisa faints, allowing Cerimon to clarify the situation (V.iii.15). Just as gold
was produced by Marina in her purification of Lysimachus, this healing of Thaisa similarly
produces treasure in the form of the “coffin” Pericles had made for Thaisa, filled with “rich
jewels” (V.iii.26-7). Thaisa connects her plight to the tempest as a woman who survived being
adrift at sea against all odds, regenerated wholly in the aftermath of her interaction with feral
water. “Did you not name a tempest, / A birth and death?” She asks, before asserting, “Thaisa am
I, supposèd dead, / And drowned” (V.iii.38-43). The family is reunited under the watchful eye of
Diana and her temple, and a promise of continuing “night oblations” is made to the goddess.
Emerging from Ephesus is two pairs of regenerated monarchs, aligned with feminine godly
authority.

The question of whether Pericles has truly changed to value women arises, of course,
with his engagement of Marina to Lysimachus. If, truly, this system of kingship was healed, how
can we then accept such a union, on which Marina has nothing to say? Is Lysimachus truly worthy of Marina, given his unsavory, brothel-frequenting past? Jeanie Moore Grant in her article “Riddled Romance: Kingship and Kinship in ‘Pericles’” argues that Lysimachus as “bridegroom is suspect”, that “he considered Marina unworthy of him until he knows she is a princess” and that he “seem shallow, if not opportunistic” (42). If all this is true, however, we must disregard that Marina is, as Moore herself states, “an agent of redemption” (42). It also characterizes the newly healed Pericles as retaining true patriarchal affiliation, forcing Marina to “submit to a choice made for her by her father”, disregarding the good, noble soul that Marina saw within Lysimachus and assisted him in recapturing (Moore 42). While Moore does agree that Marina is an agent of redemption and female power - “Marina … shines for a moment as she suggests the potential for women” - she doesn’t take the next step to state that Marina does more than suggest feminine potential, she readily shows and utilizes her skills, both in speech and in teaching other women (43). Marina exercises her innate ability of purification and regeneration, and it is “Lysimachus’ recognition of her virtue, and of her extraordinary persuasiveness, which brings Marina face to face with Pericles” (Flower 40). By the end of their first encounter, Lysimachus clearly respects Marina and is in awe of her abilities, and Marina in turn believes him to be “of honorable parts” and worthy of his position as governor because of it. Lysimachus in turn calls upon her, specifically, as a master of “sacred physic”. They also both see a possible future in one another. This match, then, between Marina and Lysimachus is hardly a violence upon her - he already defers to her expertise and readily acknowledges her connection to divine authority and spiritual healing. The female body is, here, freer from the oppression of systemic patriarchy than it was before.
The character of Diana also serves as a point of contention for some scholars. F. Elizabeth Hart’s article “‘Great is Diana’ of Shakespeare’s Ephesus” traces the lineage of Diana as a mother goddess as well as argues that Diana serves a specific function within the narrative: to “[unite] the family toward a reconstituted patriarchy”, her divinity serving as “an ultimate instrument of patriarchal power” (356-8). This portrayal of Diana, as manipulative force of an abusive system of male authority denies the significance of her appearance within the narrative. Invoked only in name until Act V, Diana serves as a tool of protection for Marina as well as one of comfort for Thaisa; she only appears physically within the narrative once Pericles has been regenerated. The blessing she gives him, then, is only offered when he’s finished his struggle and overcome corruption to accept virtue and the reality of his struggles. Diana is blessing not the system of patriarchy, at the hands of which Pericles and Marina have suffered, but the moment our protagonist is finally healed of the violence and corruption latent within the patriarchal system and allowed to accept the reality in which he lives and rules. Pericles is, it is important to note, a narrative structured as a female-centered romance; the Goddess-figure is then concerned primarily with the survival not of the patriarch but of the daughter who flees into the female-coded wilderness, Marina.

Diana does summon a complex issue, however, when viewing the narrative through a feminist lens: the categories of “mother” and “virgin” were created by the “male imagination that fragments the feminine into discernable types, which can then be assigned value on the basis of their relative utility to the patriarchy”, and so those two categories over which she reigns are problematized within the narrative (Hart 360). However, I argue that these categories do not hinder Marina and Thaisa, nor do they force them to serve a specific patriarchal function; Marina, particularly, utilizes her position as virgin stone and magnum opus to protect her body
and purify the men of Mytilene of their feelings of entitlement for the female form, replacing in its stead a respect for women and the things they can create. Thaisa, though off stage for much of the play, is in a position of authority, virtue, and respect as the alchemical queen-mother and vestal priestess; she devotes herself to the goddess which ultimately blesses her family with reunion. The claim that Diana operates in a manner which serves to “legitimate the authority of the father/Father” and restore patriarchal influence within the narrative is thusly resisted by the narrative itself. *Pericles* overcomes the construction of monarchy which requires female members of the family to sacrifice their bodily autonomy; while Marina is engaged to Lysimachus, seemingly depriving her of a choice in the matter, Marina has already deemed him a man of noble constitution. The fact of her engagement also doesn’t negate the great works of purification that she accomplishes within Mytilene - she is still a woman who has fundamentally altered the city’s perception of the female body in a way antithetical to the patriarchal system. The best way to describe the system that exists at the close of this narrative is, perhaps, a reformed patriarchy; it is a system built from a balance between both monarchs, and requiring both monarchs to operate.

In resolving a narrative conflict created by patriarchal authority through an alchemically feminist process, Marina has ushered in a reformed and balanced monarchical system that allows women to assert their own agency and authority. As the language of the narrative is tied to an alchemical tradition and is paired with a series of alchemical emblems, it is clear to see the ways in which alchemy exists in *Pericles* as both text and subtext and how these connections encourage an alchemically feminist analysis of the text itself. This kind of analysis allows us to consider the ways female characters are empowered in this narrative, and can be used to analyze other texts of this genre as well. By overcoming a patriarchal system which uses the bodies of
women as object subject to violence and violation, there comes a possibility for a more equal monarchical system. Here, the future of Renaissance women looks brighter than before. From alchemical feminism springs the freedom of possibility.

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