

The Peri's Asphodel

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Aug 1997

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Jim Jordan — 16 Aug 1997, 18:23

Some thoughts on "Seven American Nights":

0. Since most of us don't have the NYRSF, I'd appreciate corrections or other insights from anyone who has the article Mantis mentioned. Until I get to read it, I can only observe that the two play titles seem religiously significant, especially for a Catholic: "Visit to a Small Planet" and "Mary Rose."

1. The missing night might be the Moslem sabbath (Friday night), but the story does not seem have any break where this might occur. It is the second night. Notice on p. 338 that Nadan begins to recount his first day in the evening, around 4 p.m. (midnight in Teheran). He describes that he slept late, breakfasted, and then asked about visiting the city. He headed north. Then we have a break: Jasmin must not read this. It is later at night, because a candle is burning and something is beating against his window. He is full of fear, and mentions that he might have been drugged. Then there is a break, where he had edited something out, because section 4 begins "That is out out at last!...." The preceding stuff is not something that would have been hard to write, so something has been edited, something related to his true mission, something related to Gassem (see below). He then moves ("Still...") to a dream about bread that has mold on it, some kind of famous bread. Christian communion bread? At any rate, something has happened during the day to make him rejoice that he is a Persian and not an American. Then, the next section describes an actual visit to the Central City of the north, which must be the next day, because it ends with his opening the shutters to watch the sun set. Then he goes out to eat and to a play. If it was on the previous day, which it seems at first reading to have been, then this is a couple of hours after "evening" and also after he has lit a candle to write by, and that makes no sense. So, here is the missing night: the second night.

2. It certainly appears that the last egg eaten was hallucinogenic. But to a slight degree, it may be that all the food in America is hallucinogenic; notice the attention given to virtually every meal.

3. 12 days on ship + 7 days in America = 19, a significant Islamic number.

4. Peris are beautiful fairy-angels cast out of heaven for their sins, who must do penance on earth before being readmitted. So, the Americans are peris. In particular, Ardis is a peri.

5. An asphodel is a kind of lily or daffodil that was thought to cure spells of witchcraft. In the play, the Peri's Asphodel reveals Ellen's sexual desires. Nathan thinks that the attack by the demonbeast might be an enchantment, he bites his cheek and draws blood. The blood on his shirt is his Peri's Asphodel, which (perhaps) drew away the enchantment.

6. It seems that Nadan is under a spell projected by Ardis, through scent, which according to the professor is the "essence of communication." During sex, she evidently cannot project this, and can be seen for what she really is: one of the monsters from the interior brought back by her

"father." The smells of sexual congress overwhelm the smells of enchantment.

7. The asphodel has a yellow blossom; cp. the yellow dirt being washed out into the oceans around America.

8. Nadan's reason for coming to America may have something to do with recovering miniatures, but it also involves Gasseem and apparently Tallman also. He avoids Gasseem, who avoids him also. He makes an enemy of Tallman. Something important happens on the second day, which is edited out by Nathan. A possible scenario: These two tail him, and point him out to Ardis and the theatre troupe, who observe him through the theatre curtain. They also set a demonbeast to tail and murder him. The troupe conspires to get his sketchbook. Why? Perhaps Gasseem thinks that Nadan had sketched him on board ship. Ardis starts seducing Nadan on their first night, which he accept naively and which thrills him. Then she leaves, probably to report to Gasseem and Tallman. She acts swiftly to remove Nadan from their presence at the restaurant. One of the actors has conveniently disappeared, so Nadan is pressed into service to play Ardis's lover and husband (pushing him toward her, though that part of the plot was unnecessary because Nadan was already infatuated with her), and then goes to Ardis's apartment, while his own room is searched. The conspirators read his journal, become aware of his intense infatuation with Ardis, and change their plans for him. The next day she attempts to seduce him into abandoning his mission and going with her into the interior.

9. Another possible scenario is this: The theatre troupe marks foreigners and scams them. In this case, the reason Ardis leaves the restaurant before being seen by Gasseem and Tallman is precisely what she says: She and Bobby have set up a scheme to get their money. She's probably used her seductive enchantments on them. But she and Bobby have also marked Nadan. In this case, it was Bobby who searched Nadan's room, during the long part of the play in which he had no part. In this scenario, Ardis's offer of a trip to the interior is part of her and Bobby's plot. Note that Bobby knows where she is at the end of the story; he is outside Nadan's room.

10. So, is the troupe working for Gasseem against Nadan, or are they involved in a flim-flam against all three Persians?

11. There are some interesting structural aspects. The story itself is a story within a story within a story. The outer story is the two women reading it all. Then there is the letter from the agent. The inner story is the diary. Interestingly, the fourth section, the dream about the special bread, forms a chiasm with the fourth-from-the-end section of his narrative, where he sees the Christian procession. And, in both the fifth and in the fifth-from-the-end sections, Nadan is offered a be shown a secret, first by the deformed man and then by Ardis. And, in the third section Nadan's shutter is closed against a beast, while in the antepen ultimate section, he opens the shutter to evacuate the stench of his vomit.

Continuing, in the sixth section Nadan sees a play, and in the matching section he acts in one. In the seventh section Nadan poisons the marzipan, and in the matching section he is tempted to toss it away. In the eighth section, Nadan thinks one of the whores is Jasmin, while in the matching section, he dreams of valiantly protecting Ardis (a real young man's dream!) (Ardis gradually replaces Yasmin in the story, as Nathan is seduced by America.) BTW, this matching section is on p. 370 and unfortunately is not marked with a box. In the earlier collection, there were no boxes to mark the section breaks.

In the ninth section Nadan is attacked by dogs and then potentially by a group of people; in the long matching section he is attacked by Bobby. In the tenth section he eats the first egg, while in the matching section he searches in vain for the monster he slew. Seems to be no obvious match here.

In the eleventh section he sees Mary Rose, and in the matching section he searches for Ardis's

house and is attacked by a monster. At the center (if I am correct) is an unmarked section at the top of page 355 that tells us again that Ardis is a whore.

If anyone else wants to try her/her/its hand at this (and there may be nothing to it -- I only offer it as food for thought) you can number the sections of the diary 1-23 as follows:

1. p. 337
2. 338
3. 339
4. 340
5. 340
6. 343
7. 349
8. 350
9. 351
10. 353
11. 353
12. 355 (begins "Same night." A new entry)
13. 355
14. 359
15. 359
16. 370 (begins "Morning." A new entry)
17. 370
18. 373
19. 377
20. 381
21. 381
22. 382
23. 382

Comments?

Nutria