

PEACE: Adam & The Princess

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Oct 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 22 Oct 2000, 16:21

Adam wrote:

In a way, though, Peacock's and Macafee's courtships are inversions of the fairy tale. Peacock discovers rare, hidden things but (presumably unlike the prince of gnomes) keeps them for himself. And in the Chinese egg affair, Olivia tries to maneuver Macafee into using his trading prowess for her benefit, like the merchant; but her plan backfires somehow, and she ends up buying the egg herself.

And the inversion also applies to Blaine: he makes out that running a bank doesn't interest him and is beneath him, but from his overheard words to Ricepie (p. 91 of the first edition) we know this is a pose.

I can agree with at least some of these points. The relation of the fairy tale to the "realistic" version we can glimpse is rather elastic at points of fine detail, and this in the one case that is "easy": tagged by Den himself, as it were, as a bridge between what he will write and what he cannot bring himself to write.

What we can see of Olivia and her mate-selection, she seems to be "wrestling" with each suitor within his realm of expertise: she plays intellectual/academic games with Peacock, undercutting belief in factual truth with a faith that most things are just colorful lies (see for example her lecture on new names of flowers); she does the merchant game with Macafee, but notice how again there is a tension between "artificial" (i.e., chinoiserie; her socially acceptable forgery) and "authentic" (the Chinese Egg; which seems to have begun as an olive pit [signifying "Olivia"] inside a china hen left in the Cave of the skull on that trip with Peacock and Den--talk about weirdly beautiful!).

The story itself seems to be one taken from Andrew Lang's fairy books (based upon the context it appears in; the style of the story; the illustrations it has), and since the text of PEACE mentions THE GREEN FAIRY BOOK, we might reasonably assume it to be there.

It is not. Nor is it in any of the many other Lang books.

Are any of the many embedded tales in Wolfe's works taken directly from (as opposed to being modelled on) an earlier work? None spring immediately to mind.

In the case of "The Student and his Son," the story is presented as original but is obviously based upon "Theseus and the Minotaur"; likewise other brown book tales, like "The Tale of a Boy Called Frog."

While it isn't an embedded story, in the case of "The Death of Koshchei the Deathless," Wolfe says it is Lang, and it is Lang.

The funny (or is it somehow "punny"?) thing is, Smart's tale of Mr. Tilly, haunted by the ghost, is actually the closest thing I've found to a real story in ARABIAN NIGHTS; yet you probably wouldn't guess it, since the style is straight Southern Gothic . . . but now I've jumped the gun. I'll

say no more on that for now.

If the princess is a virtual prisoner, we would expect the king to act more like her jailor, but instead he asks after each vanished suitor, and the princess gives vague, elusive answers. This suggests that the princess has the power, and is living apart by her own design and desire (which certainly seems to fit Olivia); and it almost seems as if the princess has actually _consumed_ the three men.

Well! This puts a different spin on things: the princess is perhaps less Andromeda than she is a siren. Her exile is perhaps less for her safety than the safety of the kingdom. In short, she is a monster-bride.

Cute; but Weer explicitly attributes the princess's exile to the king's jealousy of the princess's future husband (62). Nor does his questioning strike me as inconsistent with his role as jailer: he wants to know if the unwelcome suitors are still threats.

While I may have over-stated her oddness in order to shock people away from seeing her as a helpless princess, I will argue strongly against your interpretation of the king's reaction: look here, at the first case.

"In time, of course, word of this young man's fame reached the king, and he sailed out to pay a second visit to his daughter. He found her alone, but [when?] he asked the whereabouts of that paragon of paladins, the youngest son of the king of the gnomes, she would say nothing but that his kisses had tasted too strongly of fresh-turned earth"

The king seems to think highly of the gnome prince! Likewise, the second suitor: "When her father asked what had become of the enterprising merchant lad . . . " (If the king is paying any attention at all, he would =like= the girl to marry suitor one, two, or even three! <g>)

Well, having said that, if you still believe what you believe, then we just move on to the next story.

=mantis=

Adam Stephanides — 23 Oct 2000, 11:02 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

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"when" is correct, according to the 1975 first edition. Is it omitted from your edition?

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To me, "that paragon of paladins" sounds sarcastic; even in a fairy tale, I can't see someone seriously saying "Oh, where could that paragon of paladins, the youngest son of the king of the gnomes, be?" <g> The same could be true of "the enterprising merchant lad."

But the question is of doubtful relevance to the main story anyway. The king's counterpart might be Olivia's father, who leaves most of his money to Den's father, or it might be Den's father; but there's no indication that Olivia's father ever met the suitors, or that Den's father cared (unless his willingness to go all out on her wedding to Julius indicated his relief at her not choosing any of the others).

On, as you say, to the next story.

--Adam