

eat and on the other I excrete.””

Having lifted the lid of Latin from this perfectly harmless patch we proceed to finish the story for the context makes it abundantly clear that, by no stretch of imagination, can this episode be called either lascivious, lustful or lewd.

The door opens. And who opens the door? It is the Prophet himself who became hidden in order that the afflicted man might walk boldly away and not see the back or face of the door-opener. A meddling fellow purposely brought the dirty bed-clothes to the Prophet saying: 'Look! your guest has done such a thing!' He smiled and said: 'Bring the pail here, that I may wash all with my own hand.'

This incident, explains Rumi, was the occasion of the tradition of the Prophet that the infidel takes his food in seven bowls, while the true believer takes his food in one bowl.

The Maidservant and the Ass is by far the most provocative story in the *Mathnawi*, were one to accept the yard-stick applied so far by the translator. He uses the blue pencil even in the prose heading of the story which begins with the following verses rendered into Latin:²⁵

يك كنيزك يك خری بر خود فگند از و فور شهوت و فرط گزند
 آن خر نر را بگن خو کرده بود خر جماع آدمی بی بُرده بود
 يك كدویي بود حيلت سازه را در نرش كردی بی اندازه را
 در ذکر كردی كدو را آن عجوز تا رود نیم ذکر وقت سپوز
 گر همه كبر خر اندر وی رود آن رحم و آن رُودها ویران شود²⁶

A passionate, pleasure-loving maidservant had trained an ass to perform the sexual functions of a man. The crafty woman had a gourd which answered the measurement of the male, so that at the time of intercourse only half of it could penetrate. Had the whole member gone into her, her womb and intestines would have been in utter ruin.

²⁵ Vol. VI, p. 82.

²⁶ V, 1333-37.

The story is allowed to proceed. The ass was becoming lean, and his mistress was worried, but no ailment could be discerned in him. She began to investigate in earnest until one day, through a crack in the door, 'she saw the little narcissus sleeping under the ass':²⁷

دید خفته زیر خر آن نر گسک

The ass was treating the maidservant exactly in the same manner as a man takes a woman.²⁸

خر همی گاید کنیزک را چنان که بعقل و رسم مردان با زنان

The mistress became envious and said: 'Since this is possible, then I have the best right, for the ass is my property.' The ass had been perfectly trained and instructed and the mistress decided to take advantage of him. Feigning to have seen nothing, she knocked at the door. The maid with a broom in her hand opened the door. The mistress treated her like an innocent person. Later one day she sent her away on an errand. The crafty maid, whilst she went on her errand, knew exactly why she was being sent away. She was saying to herself: 'Ah, mistress, you have sent away the expert. You will set to work without the expert and will foolishly hazard your life. You have stolen from me an imperfect knowledge and you are ashamed to ask about the trap.'

After the maid is gone the narrative lapses into Latin:

بود از مستی شهوت شادمان	دَر فرو بست و همی گفت آن زمان
یافتم خلوت زَمَن از شکر بانگ	رسته ام از چار دانگ و از دو دانگ
از طرب گشته بُز آن زن هزار	در شرار شهوتِ خر بی قرار
چه بُز آن کآن شهوت او را بُز گرفت	بُز گرفتن گنج را نبود شگفت ²⁹

She was happy at the (anticipation) of the pleasurable passion. She closed the door behind her and said (to herself): 'Now I can shout my

²⁷ V, 1343.

²⁸ V, 1345.

²⁹ V, 1361-64.

thanks! Now I am free from all worries: (I have perfect uninterrupted privacy).' Out of pleasure her vagina (was singing like) a nightingale. She was impatient for the flame of passion. Having reached the height of excitement it was no wonder she was already feeling dizzy.

Lustful desire, goes on Rumi, makes the heart deaf and blind, so that an ass seems like Joseph, fire like light. Cupidity causes foul things to appear fair. Sensuality has disgraced a hundred thousand good names. Its spell made dung seem honey to you, it caused an ass appear like Joseph. And then we are allowed a peep into the room where the mistress is now closeted with the ass, and of course it is Latin again:

شادمانه لا جرم کیفر چشید	دَر فرو بست آن زن و خر را کشید
خفت اندر زیر آن نر خرستان	در میانِ خانه آوردش کشان
تا رسد در کام خود آن قجه نیز	هم بر آن کرسی که دید او از کنیز
آتشی از کیر خر در وی فروخت	با بر آورد و خر اندر وی سبخت
تا بخایه در زمان خاتون بمرد	خر مودب گشته در خاتون فشرد
رودها بسکسته شد از همدگر	بر درید از زخم کیر خر جگر
کرسی از یک سو زن از یک سُو فتاد	دم نزد در حال آن زن جان بداد
مُرد او و بُرد جان رب المنون	صحن خانه پر ز خون شد زن نگون
تو شهیدی دیده، از کیر خر ³⁰	مرگ بد با صد فضیحت ای پدر

That woman closed the door and dragged the ass and undoubtedly she enjoyed herself. Slowly she pulled him into the house and slept below the big ass. In order to achieve her end she stood on the same chair as she had seen the maidservant use. She raised her legs and the ass penetrated her. From his member he set her on fire. The ass politely pressed the lady up to his testicles until she was dead. The member of the ass burst her liver and tore apart the intestines. She did not utter a word and laid down her life. The chair fell on one side and the woman on the other. The courtyard of the house was smeared with blood, the woman lay prostrate. Without doubt the calamity had come. Such a bad end, O reader; have you ever seen a martyr to the member of an ass!

³⁰ V, 1382-90.

Immediately after this scene the moral follows:

Hear from the *Qur'an* (what is) *the torment of disgrace*:³¹ do not sacrifice your life in such a shameful cause.

Know that the male ass is this bestial soul: to be under it is more shameful than that (woman's behaviour).

If you die in egoism in the way of the fleshly soul, know for certain that you are like that woman.³²

When the maid returned she found that her worst fears had come true. Addressing the dead mistress she says:

کیر دیدی همچو شهد و چون خبیص آن کدو را چون ندیدی ای حریص
یا چو مستغرق شدی در عشقِ خر آن کدو پنهان بماندت از نظر³³

You only saw the member which appeared so tempting and sweet to you, but in your greed you omitted to see the gourd. Or else you were so absorbed in your love for the ass that the gourd remained hidden from your sight.

The following verses which bring out the moral of the story have been rendered into Latin:

صاحب دام ابلهانرا سر بُرید و آن ظریفان را به مجلسها کشید -
که از آنها گوشت می آید بکار و ز ظریفان بانگ و ناله زیر و زار
پس کنیزک آمد از اشکاف در دید خاتون را بمرده زیر خر
گفت ای خاتونِ احمق این چه بُود گر ترا اُستاد خود نقشی نمود
ظاهرش دیدی سرش از تو پنهان اوستا ناگشته بگشادی دکان³⁴

The Master of domesticated animals cut off the head of the fools and invited the wise ones to his assembly to eat them. Their flesh alone is useful while the wise ones (have many uses such as) humble prayer and sincere supplication. The maidservant then came in from the little creek of the door and saw the lady dead below the ass. 'O stupid lady!' she said, 'what is this? Did your teacher ever provide you with the proper picture? You saw only the appearance and the secret remained hidden from you. You simply opened a shop without mastering the tricks of the trade!'

³¹ عذاب الخزی

³² V, 1391-93.

³³ V, 1420-21.

³⁴ V, 1415-19.