

This unusual story is about a traveler in Turkey who is looking for a good time and has a strange adventure with a young woman. The author, AVRAM DAVIDSON, is one of the contemporary masters of adult fantasy. His novel, The Phoenix and the Mirror, is a classic, and his volumes of short stories are filled with gems. Davidson has been awarded the Life Achievement Award by the World Fantasy Convention and won World Fantasy Awards for specific works twice. His fantasy fiction is polished and elegant, witty and compressed. This story is from his early collection, Or All the Seas with Oysters (1962).

Great Is Diana **BY AVRAM DAVIDSON**

“Whenever the sexes separate, at a party like this, I mean, after dinner,” Jim Lucas said, “I keep feeling we ought to have walnuts and port and say ‘*Gempmun, the Queen!*’ like in the old English novels.”

“Naa, you don’t want any *port*,” Don Slezak, who was the host, said, opening the little bar. “What you want-”

Fred Bishop, who had taken a cigar out of his pocket, put it back. “Speaking of the old English,” he began. But Don didn’t want to speak of the old English.

“I want you to try this,” he said. “It’s something I invented myself. Doesn’t even have a name yet.” He produced a bottle and a jug and ice and glasses. Jim looked interested; Fred, resigned. “It’s really a very simple little drink,” Don observed, pouring. “You take white rum—any good white rum—and cider. But it’s got to be *real* cider. None of this pasteurized apple juice that they allow them to sell nowadays as cider. So much of this... so much of that. Drink up.”

They drank. “Not bad at all. In fact,” Fred smacked his lips, “very good. Strange, how fashions in drink change. Rum was it until gin came in; then whisky. Now, in the seventeen hundreds...”

Don got up and noisily prepared three more rum-and-ciders. “Ah,” he said, quaffing, “it goes down like mother’s milk, doesn’t it.” Jim put his glass down empty with a clatter. Don promptly made more.

“Mother’s milk,” Jim said. He was reflective. “Talk about fashions in *drink*... dextrose, maltose, corn syrup, and what the hell else they put into the babies nowadays. How come the women aren’t born flat-chested, explain me *that*, Mr. Bishop?”

Fred smiled blandly. “Proves there’s nothing *to* this evolution nonsense, doesn’t it. Particularly after that sordid Pilt-down business...”

Don Slezak poured himself another. “Got to go a little bit easy on the cider,” he said. “Rum, you can get rum anywhere, but real cider... That’s a *revolting* idea!” he exclaimed, struck by a delayed thought. “Flat-chested. Ugh.”

Jim said, defensively, that it would serve the women right. “Dextrose, maltose, corn syrup. No wonder the kids nowadays are going to Hell in a hotrod. They’re rotten with chemicals before they can even *walk!*”

“The poor kids.” Don choked down a sob. Jim waved his glass.

“Another thing. Besides that, Nature *meant* women to nurse their babies. Nature meant them to have *twins*. ‘Sobvious. Or else they’d just have *one*. In the middle. Like a cyclops or something. And how many women do *you* know or do I know, who have twins? Precious damn few, let *me* tell you... Oh, Margaret Sanger has a lot to answer for,” he said, darkly.

Don smirked. “Spotted the flaw in *that* argument right away. According to *you*, cows should have quadruplets.” He began to laugh, then to cough. Jim’s face fell. Fred Bishop at once put his cigar back again.

“Curious you should bring that up. The late Alexander Graham Bell passed the latter years of his life developing a breed of sheep which would produce quadruplets. In order for the ewes to be able to nourish these multiple births they had to possess four functioning teats instead of the usual two.”

Don squirmed. “I wish you’d pronounce that word as it’s spelled,” he said. “It sounds so *vulgar* when you rhyme it with ‘*pits*.’”

Jim crunched a piece of ice, nodded his head slowly. Then he spat out the pieces. “Just occurred to me: Doesn’t something like that sometimes occur in women? ‘*Polymam-*’ something? Once knew a woman who was a custom brassiere-maker, and she claimed that-”

A dreamy look had come into Don's eyes. "Suppose a fellow was one of these whatdayacallits? a breast-fetishist." He got the latter word out with some difficulty. "Why, he'd go *crazy*—"

"Why don't you mix up another round, Don?" Fred suggested, craftily. "Jim could help you. And I will tell you about the interesting career of Mr. Henry Taylor, who was, in a way, an example of what Aldous Huxley calls the glorious eccentrics who enliven every age by their presence."

Mr. Henry Taylor [Fred continued] was an Englishman, which is a thing glorious enough in itself. He was not, even by our foolish modern standards, too much of an eccentric; which is an argument in favor of free will over heredity. His grandfather, Mr. Fulke Taylor, in unsolicited response to the controversies between the Houses of Hanover and Stuart, had managed to plague both—and the Houses of Parliament as well—with genealogical pamphlets he had written in favor of the claims (which existed only in his own mind) of a distant, distaff branch of the Tudors. He also willed a sum of money to be used in translating the works of Dryden into the Cornish language. The task was duly carried out by a prolific and penniless clergyman named Pendragon, or Pendennis, or Pen-something; it did much to prevent the extinction of the latter's family, but had, alas, no such effect upon the Cornish language.

Trevelyan Taylor, Henry's father, was much taken up—you will recall this was in the seventeen hundreds—with what he called "*These new and wonderful Discoveries*": meaning the efforts of Robert Bakewell and the brothers Bates in the recently developed science of selective breeding. "Previously," wrote Trevelyan Taylor, "*Animal Husbandry was left entirely to the animals themselves. We shall alter that.*"

Others might inbreed, crossbreed, linebreed, and outbreed in the interest of larger udders or leaner bacon; old Trevelyan spent thirty devoted years in the exclusive purpose of developing a strain of white sheep with black tails. There has seldom been a longer experiment in the realm of pure science, but after the old man's death the whole flock (known locally as Taylor's Tails) was sold to an unimaginative and pre-Mendelian drover named Huggins, thus becoming history. And mutton.

The flock, if it produced no profit, at least paid for itself, and its owner had spent little on other things. Henry Taylor, who had enjoyed a comfortable allowance, now found himself with an even more comfortable income. He turned ancestral home and estate over to his younger brother,

Laurence (later, first Baron Osterwold), and set forth on his travels. London saw him no more—“*London, where I have passed so much of my youth,*” as he wrote in a letter to his brother, “*in profligate Courses as a Rake and a Deist.*” These two terms are, of course, not necessarily synonymous.

Henry Taylor crossed over to the continent with his carriage, his horses, his valet, clothes, commode, dressing case, and toilet articles. No one had yet begun to vulcanize or galvanize or do whatever it is to rubber which is done, but he had a portable, collapsible sailcloth bath—all quite in the Grand Tradition of the English Milord. Throughout all the years that he continued his letters—throughout, at least, all of the European and part of the Asiatic term of his travels—he insisted that his tour was for educational purposes.

“I devote myself,” he wrote, “to the study of those Institutions of which I count myself best qualified to judge. I leave to others the Governance and Politick of Nations, and their Laws and Moral Philosophies. My Inquiries—empirick, all—are directed towards their Food, their Drink, their Tobacco, and their Women. Especially their Women! Glorious Creatures, all, of whatsoever Nation. I love them all and I love every Part of them, Tresses, Eyes, Cheeks, Lips, Necks, Napes, Arms, Bosoms...

“Why do Women cloack their lovely Bosoms, Brother?” he demands to know. “Why conceal their Primest Parts? So much better to reveal them pridefully, as do the Females in the Isles of Spice... I desire you’ll send [he adds] by next vessel to stop at Leghorn, 6 lbs. fine Rappee Snuff and 4 cases Holland Gin.”

Taylor passed leisurely through France, the Low Countries, various German States, Denmark, Poland, Austria, Venice, Lombardy, Modena, Tuscany, the Papal Dominions, the Kingdom of Naples and the two Sicilies, and—crossing the Adriatic—entered the Turkish hegemonies in Europe by way of Albania... the tobacco was much better than in Italy, but he complained against the eternal sherbets of the Turks, who were, he said, in the manner of not offering strong waters to their guests, “*no better than the Methodies or other dehydrated Sectarians.*” He was not overpleased with the Greek practice of putting resin in their wine, and noted that “*they eat much Mutton and little Beef and drink a poor sort of Spirits called Rockee .*” He liked their curdled milk, however, and—of course—their women.

“The Men here wear Skirts,” Henry Taylor says, “and the Women wear Pantalones... I have made diligent Inquiry and learned that this

unnatural Reversal doth not obtain in all Matters domestick, however.“ He cites details to support this last statement.

There is a picture of him done at this time by an itinerant Italian painter of miniatures. It shows a well-made man in his thirties, dressed in the English styles of the year of Taylor’s departure, with a line of whisker curling down his jaw; clean-shaven chin and upper-lip, and a rather full mouth. He began to learn Turkish and the Romaic, or vernacular Greek, to sit cross-legged and to suck at a hookah, to like the tiny cups of black and syrupy coffee, and—eventually—to dispense with an interpreter. He spoke face to face with the pasha of each district he passed. He rather liked the Turks.

“There is among them none of this Hypocritical Nonsense, as with us, of having One Wife, to whom we are eternally yoked unless we care to display our Horns and our Money to the House of Lords.” He reports a conversation he had with *“a Black Eunuch in Adrianople. I asked him quite Boldly if he were not sensible of his Great Loss, and he pointed to an Ass which was grazing nearby and said with a Laugh-”* But I really cannot repeat what he said.

Taylor said he *“admired his Wit, but was not happy at the aptness of his Analogy.”*

From the Balkans he went on to Asia Minor, where he made a closer acquaintance of the famous Circassian women—the raising and the sale of whom was seemingly the chief business of their native hills. He pauses in his flow of metaphors to ask a question. *“If I compare the Breasts of the Turkish Women to full Moons, with what shall I compare those glorious Features possessed by the Circassians? I would liken them to the warm Sun, were the Sun Twins.”*

* * * *

“Polymastia!” Jim exclaimed. He smiled happily. Fred blinked. Don said, “Huh?”

“Not ‘*polymam-*’ something, but polymastia: ‘Having many breasts.’ Just now remembered. Came across it once, in a dictionary.”

“Just like that, huh?” Don asked. “Were you considering becoming a latter-day A. G. Bell with the human race instead of sheep?”

“Go on, Fred,” Jim said, hastily. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

* * * *

Taylor’s next letter [Fred continued, after a very slight pause] was dated more than a year later, from Jerusalem. He had conceived a desire to visit the more remote regions of Western Asia Minor, eventually heading for the coast, whence he hoped to visit certain of the Grecian islands. As large areas were impassable to his carriage, he was obliged to hire mules. He gives a description, as usual, of the nature of the country and people, but without his usual lively humor. Suddenly, without any connecting phrases, the letter plunges into an incident which had occurred that day in Jerusalem.

“I visited a synagogue of the Polish Jews here, having some business of minor Importance with one of their Melamedins, or Ushers. It is a small room, below Street-level, furnished as well as their Poverty permits of. There was an Inscription of some sort at the Lectern, but they had been burning Candles by it for so long that it was obscured by Soot and Smoke.

“Only the single word Hamatho was visible, and I confess to you, Dear Brother, that when I saw this word, which means, His Wrath, a Shudder seized me, and I groaned aloud. Alas! How much have I done to merit His Wrath. ...”

And then, without further explanation, he reverts to his ramble in Asia Minor. His party had come over the Duzbel Pass to a miserable Turkish village east of Mt. Koressos, “a wretched marshy neighborhood where I was loth to stop, fearing the Ague. But some of the Mules required to be shod, and we were preceded at the forge by some Turkishes officers, Yezz Bashy or Bimm Bashi, or like preposterous Rank and Title. So there was no help for it. It promised to take Hours, and I went a-walking.” Henry Taylor soon left the village behind and found himself in wild country. He had no fears for his safety, or of being lost, he explained, because he had pistols and a small horn always about him. By and by he entered a sort of small valley down which a stream rushed, and there, drinking at a pool, he saw a woman.

“She was dark, with black Eyes and Hair, buxom and exceedingly comely. I thought of the Line in the Canticle: I am black but beautiful. Alas! That I did not call to mind those other lines, also of Solomon, about the Strange Woman. And yet it was, I suppose, just as well, for ‘Out of the Strong came forth Sweet.’ “

On seeing her, he freely confesses, he had no hopes other than for an enormous adventure, and was encouraged by her lack of shyness. He spoke to her in Turkish, but she shook her head. She understood Greek, however, though her accent was strange to him, and she said that her name was Diana. She offered him a drink from her cup, he accepted, and they fell into conversation. *“Although she gave no Details about her Home, and I pressed her for none, I understood that she was without present Family and was in what we should call Reduced Circumstances. For she spoke of Times past, when she had many Maid Servants and much Wealth, and the tears stood in her Eyes. I took her hand and she offered no objections.”*

The next lines are written in ink of a different color, as if he had put off writing until another time. Then, *“In short, Brother, I pursued the Way usual to me in those Days, and although she gave me her Lips, I was not content to stop, but was emboldened to thrust my Hand into her Bodice... and thus perceived in very short order that she was not a Human Female but an Unnatural Monstrosity. I firmly believe, and was encouraged in Belief by a worthy Divine of the Eastern Church to whom I revealed the Matter, that this Creature who called herself Diana had no Natural Existence, but was a Daemon, called forth, I first thought, by the Devil himself...”*

“I am now convinced that she was a very Type of Lust, sent to test or prove me. That is, to horrify me in that same Sin in which I had so long wallowed, and to turn those Features, in which I had intended to take illicit Delight, into a Terror and Revulsion. I ran, I am not ashamed to own it, until I fell bleeding and exhausted at the Forge, and was taken by a Fever of which I am long recovering...”

According to the standards of his time there was only one thing for him to do under the circumstances, and he did it. He got religion. There had lately been established in Jerusalem an office of the British and Overseas Society for the Circulation of Uncorrupted Anglican Versions of the Scriptures; Henry Taylor became a colporteur, or agent, of this Society, and was sent among the native Christians of Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, and Persia.

He never knew, because he died before it became known, that the Turkish village where he had his shocking experience was near the site of the ancient city of Ephesus. Its famous Temple of Diana was one of the Seven Wonders of the World and was served by hundreds of priestesses

and visited by pilgrims in throngs. But that was before the Apostle Paul came that way and “*Many of those which used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men.*” But not every one in Ephesus was so quickly convinced.

A certain “*Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana... called together the workmen of like occupation, and said ... that not alone in Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger. . . but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion. ...*”

* * * *

“I am also filled with confusion,” Don said. “First we hear about this Limey, Taylor: he tries to grab a feel and gets the screaming meemies. All of a sudden—a Bible class.”

Jim clicked his tongue. “That *word*—It’s slipped my mind again Poly-? Ploy-?”

“Patience,” Fred pleaded. “Why aren’t you more patient?”

* * * *

The confusion in Ephesus [Fred said] was finally ended by a city official who “*appeased*” the mob by asking, “*What man is there that knoweth not now that the City of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?... Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.*”

Long after Henry Taylor’s time, the archeologists uncovered the temple site. Among the many images they found was one which may perhaps be that same one “*which fell down from Jupiter.*” It is carved from black meteoric stone, and was obviously intended for reverence in fertility rituals, for the goddess is naked to the waist, and has, not two breasts, but a multitude, a profusion of them, clustering over the front of the upper torso...

“Well, you’re not going to make too much out of this story, are you?” Jim asked. “Obviously this condition was hereditary in that district, and your pal, H. Taylor, just happened to meet up with a woman who had it, as well as the name Diana.”

“It is certainly a curious coincidence, if nothing more,” said Fred.

Don wanted to know what finally became of Henry Taylor. “He convert any of the natives?”

“No. They converted him. He became a priest.”

“You mean, *he gave up women?*”

“Oh, no: Celibacy is not incumbent upon priests of the Eastern Church. He married.”

“But not one of those babes from the Greater Ephesus area, I’ll bet,” Don said.

Jim observed, musingly, “It’s too bad old Alexander Graham Bell didn’t know about this. He needn’t have bothered with sheep. Of course, it *takes longer with people-*”

Fred pointed out that Dr. Bell had been an old man at the time.

“He could have set up a foundation. I would have been *glad* to carry on the great work. It wouldn’t frighten *me*, like it did Taylor... Say, you wouldn’t know, approximately, how *many* this Diana had-?”

“It must sure have taken a lot out of Taylor, all right,” Don said. “I bet he was never much good at anything afterwards.”

Fred took one last swallow of his last drink. The jug and bottle, he observed, were empty. “Oh, I don’t know about that,” he said. “In the last letter he wrote to his brother before the latter’s death, he says: ‘*My dear Wife has observed my sixty-fifth Birthday by presenting me with my Fifth Son and ninth Child... I preach Sunday next on the Verse, “His Leaf Also Shall not Wither” (Psalms).*’ “