

The magic of storytelling or the strategy of words

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Abstract

One Thousands and One Nights is a story of a woman struggling between life and death nevertheless she acts wisely. One may think that why Shahrazad kept telling stories for thousands night? Was it to entertain or engage the king or dose it serves a higher purpose, to educate? This study intends to investigate the purpose of Shahrazad as the narrator whose strategy of words had a magical end. Shahrazad with determination saves her own life and preserves the king from oblivion. She made the World a better and safe place for her children simply by means of storytelling.

Keywords: *One Thousands and One Nights, Shahrazad, storytelling, strategy of words.*

Introduction

Storytelling has been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education, intellectual preservation and for the purpose of infusing moral values. All the way through the ancient tales that reproduced from even older oral traditions in the Middle East, *One Thousand and One Nights* is of a great importance. The narrator, Shahrazad, occupies not only the position of a storyteller, but of an instructor. Throughout *One Thousand and One Nights* she tells ideas about violence, jealousy, and misogyny in the hopes of exposing the reality of life to Shahryar, the Persian king. While never appearing to taking an authoritative role, since she maintains the appearance of entertaining instead of instructing in the course of relating the stories; many valuable lessons are espoused and although the King is clearly entertained, she makes sure that the messages behind her stories are not falling on deaf ears.

Having a clearly visible theme Shahrazad wishes to express a number of issues through vignettes in *One Thousand and One Nights* that are meant to instruct just as they are to entertain. The modern reader of *One Thousand and One Nights* may wish to project a feminist agenda onto the stories she tells, but this would be a fallacy since several of her tales include graphic and rather misogynistic descriptions and messages. Still, however, Shahrazad offers a balanced picture of human wrongs in *One Thousand and One Nights* and attempts to expose the erroneous of both sexes equally. While she tries throughout her nights with the king to make him see the true path of life, "Shahrazad's role as a teacher is neither declared, nor predefined, nor articulated in the process, but hidden behind her role as storyteller and entertainer" (Naithani 277). It is possible to view Shahrazad's tales as lessons on certain social ills and moreover, attempt to define her as a heroine.

When the reader is introduced to Shahrazad in *One Thousand and One Nights*, it is learned that she "pursued books, annals, and legends of preceding Kings...She had pursued the works of poets and knew them by heart...studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments (Burton 15). This description stands in stark contrast to the previous portrayals of women in *One Thousand and One Nights* of how Shahryar came to hate women and immediately sets the reader up for expecting something more from this woman (who unlike the women mentioned in the story, is actually granted a name). After learning about her education, which it is implied has come from self-teaching and a personal love of learning, it is exposed that she is strong-willed and unwilling to relent to male pressure. Her father threatens her with equal treatment but instead of bending under his will, she responds in true heroic fashion, "I wish thou wouldst give me in marriage to this King Shahryar; either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance" (Burton 15). What is perhaps most striking about this statement is that she is implying that there is a feminist motivation to her potentially deadly altruistic action. Strangely however, while one might expect this set-up to lead into a series of feminist tales, her first few stories are about the typical evils and unfaithful wives. While it has been mentioned that her tales are meant to serve as entertaining instruction, one must wonder why Shahrazad, with these feminist underpinnings spurning her action, does not engage in less misogynistic tales at the beginning.

Shahrazad is quite the fearless hero throughout the course of *One Thousand and One Nights* and while this may extend to her refusal to submit to male authority, it does not encompass her choices of tales to tell the clearly misogynistic king. If it is in fact her aim to teach the king lessons, given her previous behavior, one might expect her tales to have a more

recognizable feminist motivation. As it is, she relates tales about women who do wrong by their husbands, use magic to trick men, and the woman who engage in sexual power-plays. One critic pointed out the potential foolishness of Shahrazad's choice of tales by stating, even the very first story, *The Merchant and The Jinni*, introduces the theme of wicked wives, which renders it an unsuitable or, in the case of a wife having contact with a black slave, even tactless choice by a woman in such a dangerous situation as Shahrazad's" (Enderwitz 188). While Enderwitz may be correct in assuming that this is a dangerous choice, it has been overlooked that Shahrazad rejects the idea that men pose a threat to her. If that is not quite the case then at least she has some feeling of her ability to soothe their anger—with words rather than sexual appeals. Perhaps by mirroring the king's interactions with women in her tales, even if the woman is in the wrong, there is still some displaced lesson being taught, even if it is merely that there are some women who deserve punishment while there are also others who should have the right to fair treatment.

In the first several pages of *One Thousand and One Nights* there are a multitude of cases of unfaithful and evil women, but there are equally several tales regarding the idiocy of men to balance the message. Considering that the frame-story is based on a completely misogynistic pretext (a king determined to sleep with and then kill a woman every night) some of the "bite" of this is taken out of the story by the strong willed heroine Shahrazad, who uses her wit and vast stores of knowledge to gain her desire instead of her sexuality. Through her tales, Shahrazad presents a number of representations of women and does not rely on the stereotype presented at the beginning of the book when all women are viewed as unfaithful. While there are, of course, many examples of the traitorous and unfaithful woman stereotype her royal listener might be expecting, there are also examples of ingenious women who while not good per se, are capable of using their wits and proving themselves to be more than one-dimensional sex-objects.

One of the strangest cases of dubious female representation occurs before Shahrazad is introduced and concerns the idea of the cuckold genie and his seductress who forces the two kings, already wandering the countryside due to their hatred of women, to reply to her near her giant lover. The men are hesitant for several reasons, the most pressing being the fact that the genie could kill them at any moment, but eventually concede to her demands. In some ways, the narrator telling this story is acting as a sort of precursor to Shahrazad because there is the attempt to teach a lesson (not to be the sleeping giant near a deceitful woman) and to foreshadow the theme of violent reactions to jealousy. "The Jinni seated her under the tree by his side and looking at her said, "O choicest love of this heart of mine! O dame of noblest line, whom I snatched away on thy bride night that none might prevent me taking thy maidenhead or tumble thee before I did, and whom none save myself hath loved or hath enjoyed: O my sweetheart! I would fief sleep a little while" (Burton 7). The genie had taken her away from her life in order to have her and thus she was kept captive due to her gender. Her pleasure was to collect the rings of men she had seduced so that she would be able to count her victories. In many ways, this counting of the rings—a sign of female power over male domination—is similar and foreshadowing the countdown of days throughout the text. We are constantly reminded as the days pass, one to the other, and as they do; Shahrazad adds more "rings" to her collection. This story serves to prepare the reader for the introduction of Shahrazad and gives a cursory introduction as well to themes of 'male weakness' the desiring woman 'female weakness' and the more important theme—the presentation of one of many ways in which women are shown to have authority over men.

In her 'lessons' in *One Thousand and One Nights* Shahrazad's message becomes a bit less feminist when she tells single-gender stories (those in which women are not involved). There are a number of tales that she tells about kings and princes that do not involve feminine and in most of these cases, the men are able to think clearly and resolve the conflict through wits and ingenuity. As the story of the fisherman and the genie in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Unlike many of the earlier stories, there are no women present and the fisherman is able to argue with the genie and eventually trick him back into his hiding place. It would seem that when women are involved, nothing but trouble can result, thus calling to mind how feminist the motivations behind Shahrazad's storytellings are.

As the stories in *One Thousand and One Nights* grow increasingly littered with misogynistic undertones, one has to wonder what Shahrazad's position is supposed to be. The king will later grow to love her and keep her and armed with this knowledge, it almost seems fair to assume that the final message concerns females winning power through intelligence and independence balanced with (rather than dominated by) a culturally-coded submission to males. If that is true, then the final message of *One Thousand and One Nights* is hopeful. "One should remember that Shahrazad's main purpose with this strategy [of daily storytelling] is not procrastination. This could not be so: even she would eventually run out of stories. On the contrary, Shahrazad is narrating tales primarily to instruct the king" (Heath 18). Through her stories in *One Thousand and One Nights*, particularly those related in the first eight days, there is a clear distinction between what the king considers to be female—based on his hatred and what Shahrazad considers it to be. Ultimately, through her lessons in the form of stories, she depicts women as not simply deceitful and tricksters, but as capable of wit, intelligence, and much more beyond sex and infidelity.

Shahrazad starts to tell a story at the dawn of the first night but at dawn, when the story reaches to its critical point, Shahrazad says that the time is over and if the king lets her she will recount the rest of the story next night and it continues for one thousand and one nights and in this manner, confirm a relationship between Shahrazad and Shahriyar, the king with the strategy of words; in such a way that one speaks and the other whispers amorously by hearing each story, although he is quiet and finally after one thousand and one nights listening to the stories and narrations with patience, curiosity, and eagerness begins to speak openly that Shahrazad saved him from crime and suspicious about women; And this seclusion with himself, that is silence, is not less worth than that eloquence and fluency in storytelling. Then Shahrazad-with this information that death awaits her – takes the risks and becomes his wife, therefore maybe in the risk of death.

Shahrazad's weapon in this relentless battle is her words. Words against the executioner's sword. These two strategies are obviously different, although the second is stronger, Shahrazad's words are magic.

Although, Shahrazad is defenceless, her strategies of using songs and changing the tune and melody and in its time fine gestures of eyes and lips push Shahriyar to hear all the story to the end. But Shahrazad has to use a new strategy to finish the story each morning and to keep him eager to hear the rest of the stories. Moreover the stories, should not be too short, to be meaningless; and not too long to be annoying. Therefore Shahrazad has a difficult and complicated duty and she should do magic to be saved each morning from Shahriyar's deathful swear. Shahrazad's love for Shahriyar gradually emerges through the stories, and it's just shown

by their three children at the end .Therefore, the best king in the book, *One Thousand and One Nights*, is not Shahriyar, but the words that sit on the king's throne. This word is magic, because it saves Shahrazad and other girls from death, because of her techniques of storytelling.

Besides, Shahrazad tells the story in the way that friends and enemies are able to listen to each other. In other words, because Shahrazad knows how to talk to Shahriyar, that undoubtedly it comes from care, companionship, and agreement, she is also capable of talking to her stories' characters, and hearing their answers, and retelling them. Bruno Bettelheim, the American psychiatrist, who interpreted Shahrazad and Shahriyar's story from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis, claiming that Shahriyar heard about his wife's disloyalty, and saw his wife and the girl who was demon's captured- disloyalty, he is furious because he believes that all women are tricky and shrewd. Therefore, Shahriyar and his brother's opinion is that women do not deserve love, and they are created just for men's enjoyment and pleasure, thus he does not want to let women become disloyal and kills them!

Thus, through the stories she reveals Shahriyah's psyche while making the same (a man and a woman meet each other in a critical situation). The Man is really full of anger, revenge and depressed, and also he doesn't have any wish and eagerness for living and the woman is scared of death, but they find and decide a way to a mutual and balanced relationship by tolerating and accepting each other's shadow.

Shahrazad's another witty strategy of storytelling is via Dunyazad, her sister, coming and asking Shahrazad to tell a story with the intention of getting him to sleep. So, apparently Shahrazad and Shahriyar are couples and Dunyazad is like their child. This child, not only affiliate them to each other but also credit them as an adult. At the end Shahrazad shows him their real children and consequently Shahriyar's personality is developed because of being a father, a guardian and supporter of his family.

Marie Lahy-Hollbecque claims that Shahrazad as a women who defends women rights. As she tells story, a hidden secret is herself, the representative of the high and important role of honest and intelligent women which is as same as men, and behind all important and difficult works that men do. This feminist is Shahrazad. Feminism is not the invention of modern ages and is not originated at the time of human's rights.

But Shahrazad's intention of storytelling, is training and developing her quarrelsome husband and with knowing this king's temperament, defends women's rights .Now, if Shahrazad wants to train the king, then she accepts that the king is capable of being trained and therefore is getting better as the time passes. Of course, she looks before she leaps and she has a good way to start her story by patting him and starts to tell the story in a way that doesn't make him angry and in fact, she is hidden in her learned stories. Of course, it is seen from the beginning that there's a deep difference between Shahriyar and Shahrazad's personality. But Shahriyar is inexperienced like a child, and also cruel in his adult life. Then Shahrazad has to be careful about his needs too, and also she has to know that now is the time of his adulthood, and she should talk about historical realities that are countries, cities, people, races, tribes, men, and women('s) rules and ceremonies. One thousand and one nights is a book about king's training, but there's love in it, with a high importance and according to Lahy- Hollbecque; it's a book about woman praise, in Shahriyar's opinion women are more bitter than death, because he never knows love, but after hearing such stories about women's magic, she tells pleasant stories about devoted mothers and loyal love and sincere wives that were bounded to their beloved, and didn't make mistakes. Then

although some women are disloyal and disgusting, but there are many chaste and virtuous women, too. Shahriyar is a crude man that his knowledge and information about realities is so limited. Training the secret of love to this inexperienced man is a difficult work to do and needs so much time and have to be done cautiously. So, we find that *One Thousand and One Nights* is a kind of allegoric story that describes and explains how to live, that is, first Shahrazad tells the stories about love and enjoyment. And in this manner, a wild man civilized in the course of stories. The most important 'word' is in the main and the first story, the merchant and the Jinni, a story about a merchant who kills a Jinni's child unintentionally and the Jinni wants to punish him. But after hearing three stories, she doesn't kill the merchant and this is the first lesson for Shahriyar as a civilized man to have 'mercy'. Shahrazad dares to risk and in this battle with the uncertain end, her only weapon is her words. But in this talking between Shahrazad and Shahriyar, just Shahrazad is talking and Shahriyar is always quiet. In fact, Shahrazad makes him quiet to listen to the stories, and shows that he likes her and her stories. Therefore Shahriyar talks to himself and in his silence (an interior monologue) there exist a judicious and deliberate statement of deliverance. In this case that Shahrazad talks and Shahriyar listens, does not show that Shahriyar never trains, but the secret of success of the story teller is hidden in this part that is the 'silence'. In some people's opinion, Shahrazad has such virtues. We come to know Shahrazad when she first meets Shahriyar: a brave, wise, educated girl who is aware of her time such as culture, literature, history, politics, etc accepts to be a the wife of broken- hearted and murderous king to rescue other girls' lives. Shahriyar has a heart full of rancor and distaste and thinks all the women are like his disloyal wife are treacherous and light- minded, but like the other kings, he is eager to know about the history of the past and the kings and their people, to know how they were and which one is better? Shahrazad is faced with an angry man then her magic words are her parapet and hope of success.

Conclusion

The universality of the story lies in the fact that two people with different cultures, trainings, and customs, sharing stories from various characters from all around the world; Muslim, Christian and Jewish to talk or fight with each other. In this respect, this book is full of psychological considerations, and Shahrazad tell the stories with guidance or advice, in *One Thousand and One Nights*. After hearing Shahrazad's story about shepherd and angel, at the one hundred forty eighth night, Shahriyar says:" you, Shahrazad! Make me devout and I repented to kill women and girls and I regret my mistake". This regret is a little but whatever that is, it causes to shine on the storytelling's aim. And of course, Shahrazad concluded the story of Ghamar- al-zaman and Gohari by this message: "anybody who thinks all the women are the same, he is really unwise and foolish". Based on these examples, it's completely clear that Shahriyar is not just the hearer who lets the speaker alive just for hearing the rest of the story, perhaps this storytelling, called a "novelty narration".

Then, does 'the story' tell the truth that people are rescued from death by storytelling? That real people are like the story's characters, Shahrazad was not sure, but now she knows by experience that the stories can influence real life. Shahrazad in choosing a good story every day, which memorized in the past to tell at nights and stopped it in just the time to bring about the eagerness for the rest, united with the king. Therefore, Shahrazad through the art of storytelling

out speaks her mind and not by debate, dispute and indifference characterizes a peaceful way of life.

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