

# Hierarchy and honor in the arabian nights



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Social hierarchy is a civilization's categorization of people into ranks of political power and social influence based upon factors such as one's occupation, wealth, and social prestige (Oxford). The Arabian Nights: One Thousand and One Nights is famous for its series of tales primarily narrated by Scheherazade, whose insufferable husband, King Shahryar wedded and executed women each night in hopes of obtaining the honor he once lost when his primary wife had cheated on him. The Arabian Night's plot of King Shahryar's pursuit of honor is so meaningful because of the notation throughout history which states that social hierarchy is established by one's social prestige; therefore by the king's actions in obtaining his identity and honor back by executing women, he would naturally obtain a more significant hierarchy within his society.

Honor is essential for the characters in these series of tales because it is the single most priceless recognition of achievement of their morals, and prestige. Since hierarchy was an essential cultural aspect in history, and honor was needed in order to achieve hierarchy, the only normal and natural way for the characters of this story to achieve social hierarchy is through honor; which enables characters to conduct poor life-threatening actions and choices in order to obtain prestigious social hierarchy. King Shahryar's quest for social hierarchy guided by the influence of honor motivates him to make unmoral decisions. Naturally, King Shahryar makes decisions with little to no regard to traditional 'right' and 'wrong' standards of behavior. Shahryar is clearly the upmost of hierarchy because of his prestige honor in being a King and ruler of his civilization. Nonetheless, one further way in which King Shahryar obtains hierarchy and authority over others is by his actions

through wedding and murdering countless amounts of women. When King Shahryar discovers that his wife is cheating on him, he says in disgust “ How could she do this deed by me? How could she work her own death?” As this quote reveals, King Shahryar is not displeased because of his wife’s unmoral act of cheating, but more offended by her dishonor to his name. When King Shahryar catches his wife with another man, he does not show any signs of remorse. Instead, he quickly states that she ‘ had just arranged her death’. This is because when King Shahryar’s wife cheats on him, Shahryer losses some masculine traits such as assertiveness, strength, and power.

When the king’s masculinity is jeopardized he loses his own identity because his prestige is the only thing that defines him. When faced with the threat of losing his masculine persona, he implements his plan to wed a woman each night and kill her the next morning because he is undoubtedly unsecure about his identity and is willing to break his morals in order to achieve it back; “ He also swore himself by a binding oath that whatever wife he married, he would abate her maidenhead at night and slay her next morning to make sure of his honour; (16). Slaying thousands of women gives him a sense of honor, by asserting his honor; he becomes a representational figure of strength and authority thus making him a representational figure of hierarchy over women. Theses actions to obtain hierarchy are only conducted during a time when the king’s identity was in jeopardy; therefore the authors and translator of *The Arabian Nights: One Thousand and One Nights* illustrate that the actions taken by King Shahryar to defend one’s honor in obtaining hierarchy is something to be fraud upon. Scheherazade challenges the traditional pyramid of social hierarchy during the time period

that One Thousand and One Nights was written by defending women's worth.

Traditionally, men had precedence of social hierarchy over females, especially when King Shahryar was committing executions of women. In honor of all women's worth, Scheherazade attempts and succeeds in stopping the mindless executions of women in her society by volunteering herself to be romantically involved with a murderous king. Scheherazade expressed to her family " I will never desist, O my father, nor shall this tale change my purpose. Leave such talk and tattle. I will not listen to thy words and, if thou deny me, I will marry myself to him despite the nose of thee" (Burton Chap. 2). By Scheherazade's life-risking act of forming a halt to the king's binge of murders, she unofficially becomes ' above' King Shahryar on their society's social hierarchy scale. Additionally, Scheherazade puts herself as the representational figure of all women when she states " Either I shall live or I shall be a ransom for the virgin daughters of Moslems and the cause of their deliverance from his hands and thine." In this statement, Scheherazade puts herself in hierarchy of all women as she speaks on behalf and makes a decision for all women in her society. Additionally, the author of The Arabian Nights: One Thousand and One Nights suggest in this statement that Scheherazade's defense of honor and becoming of greater hierarchy can be a bad idea that puts her in a dangerous position between life and death. Although Scheherazade makes a well-intentioned decision based on her upmost morals unlike King Shahryar who unmorally obtains his honor, her decision is not any better. Scheherazade's actions still put her safety at risk in saving the thousands of other women, which make her actions a bad

decision. Although her actions and words put her in hierarchy of all of society's wellbeing, hierarchy obtained through honor is presented as a dangerous decision, concluding that not all honorary decisions are good ones.

The Arabian Nights: One Thousand and One Night's plot is largely influenced by the contribution of Scheherazade's and King Shahryar's quest for honor, which subsequently puts them into a superior social hierarchal rank above the rest of society. Hierarchy through honor could prevalently be seen when King Shahryar attempts to regain honor by killing thousands of woman, subsequently becoming a figure of hierarchy over women because he becomes in control of women, their where a bouts, and well being. This notation is furthermore present when Scheherazade decides to take initiative and honor women's worth by volunteering herself to be the king's next wife so that he will no longer conduct an execution each night.

By conducting an action on behalf of all women in her society as well as controlling the king's actions, Scheherazade becomes of a greater hierarchy over King Shahryar and women in their civilization. The actions that characters choose to pursue to defend their honor reveal the character's morals: for instance, when King Shahryar kills women he reveals that he has little concern for morals. Likewise, Scheherazade reveals that she is willing to risk her life to defend morality by stopping the king's executions. Hierarchy is known as the order of power between permanent objects and human beings; equally in this tale, hierarchy among society is most achieved through the amount of honor one consumes through various bad decisions.

Works Cited " THE ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS (ALF LAYLAH WA LAYLAH) STORY OF KING SHAHRYAR AND HIS BROTHER." Trans. Richard Burton. THE ARABIAN NIGHTS, 1850. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. " Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar." Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. Oxford University Press, n.