

# Brains vs beauty



In the Tales from the Thousand and One Nights the women are represented as fraudulent, cunning characters using their sexuality to their benefit. Some of these women are portrayed as deceitful harlots, while others honestly use their sly wits and beauty to their advantage to obtain what they desire. In the time of the Tales, female sexuality was prevalent, so it's not absurd to read about all the infidelity and sexuality in these stories; however it is interesting to see how each female character uses that to her benefit. Some women show to be evil minded while others have good intentions.

Throughout the Tales from the Thousand and One Nights, there are different stories that Shahrazad tells, depicting the women in different manners. Some women were represented as deceitful whores, such as the wives of the kings in the Prologue of the Tales, others used their wit and knowledge to gain their desire, for example, Shahrazad, the story teller of the book.

Shahrazad uses these women as examples to show King Shahriyar and his brother, Shahzaman that not all women are untrustworthy. They just know how to use what they have sexually and intellectually to gain control of a situation. By sexually, I don't mean throwing themselves at different men; men are weak and will easily fall for anything a woman says if he thinks he will "benefit" from it. In "The Tale of King Shahriyar and his Brother Shahzaman" the two kings find out that their wives were frolicking about having affairs with different men. This is in the Prologue of the Tales, the two kings went on an expedition and ran into a woman, who happened to be the wife of a Jinnee, she threatened the brothers to please her or she shall wake the Jinnee. Once the fowl woman was done using the kings for her pleasure,

she proceeded to pull out a string with ninety-eight rings on it. Each ring represented a man she had slept with.

The kings were astonished but at the same time relieved, “ If such a thing could happen to a mighty Jinnee, then our misfortune is light indeed”(19). In the beginning stories, women look like they are the villains in the book, because they portray themselves to be indecent harlots. The kings at this point come to the conclusion that all women are they same, so they devise a plan to be with a virgin every night and kill her the next morning. The brothers will never feel the pain of a broken heart again. Sexual fidelity has always been the core social concern. Some of these tales prove that to be true. The kings refuse to let that happen to them again, so they come up with this plan.

So as one can see, the women so far in the Tales hold a bad reputation, until King Shahriyar met the Vizier’s daughter, Shahrazad. Shahrazad, is also the storyteller of the Tales she begs her father to let her marry the king despite the fact that he wishes to kill her in the morning. She was very confident that she could sway the king’s decision of her dooming death. She devised a plan with her sister in high hopes that it will save her life. Shahrazad was going to ask for her sister, Dunyazad to bid her a farewell, and she was to ask Shahrazad to tell a “ tale of marvel, so that the night may pass pleasantly”(23). The king agreed. In this story Shahrazad proves to use her wit to her advantage, although she knows that her death is possibly near she shows strength and confidence.

She knows that if she can pull this off, not only will she save her own life and the life of any other of the king's victims, but also she will be made the wife of the king. She cunningly uses her knowledge to prolong her death.

Shahrazad presents a number of representations of women throughout the stories in the Tales and does not rely on the stereotype presented at the beginning of the book when all women are perceived as harlots. In the story, "The Woman and Her Five Lovers" a young woman falls in love with a young man who gets into a brawl and is imprisoned. The woman is distraught and thinks of a plan to free her lover. She goes to five men to help her achieve her goal. She goes to the Governor, the Vizier, the Cadi, and the King asking them to sign a petition to free her lover.

Instead of telling them that he is her husband, she tells them that he is her brother and her sole support. The four men are so at awe with her beauty and sexual demeanor that they agree, but only if they can have her for one night. She convinces these men to meet her at her house, "it is more fitting that I should wait for you at my house, were there are neither slaves nor maidservants to intrude upon our privacy"(107). She then goes to a carpenter and asks him to build a cupboard of four large compartments, he said he'd do it with honor and free of charge if she would give him one night to himself. The sly woman agreed and in the midst of leaving told the carpenter she forgot she needed five cupboards, not four. The carpenter did as she ordered. One by one the men started to show at her house, she greeted each man kissing the ground before him and saying slick remarks such as, "first take of your clothes and your turban.

You will be much more comfortable in this light robe and bonnet”(109). Not soon after there'd be a knock at the door, the woman would tell the men to quickly jump into the cupboard because that was her husband at the door. They all ended up in the cupboard, but the woman made sure to have all petitions signed so that her husband could be freed. Once the men were locked up, she rescued her lover. In this specific story, Shahrazad showed the King that not all women are unfaithful. She did use her sexuality to her benefit to connive these men into her ultimate goal, to free her lover. She used her wit just as Shahrazad had.

This particular character in the book goes against the perception in the beginning of the Tales that all women are unfaithful. She might have been wrong per se because she deceived the five men, but she did it for her lover, which in turn, makes her a heroine in her lover's eyes. The idiocy of the men to fall for her seductive demeanor leads them to an unpleasurable stay locked in a cupboard. In the times the Tales were told in, it was the norm for woman to be seductive, women knew that they had an advantage because men are weak when it comes to the desire of a beautiful lady. So in these tales, it is not unusual to read stories of such perversity. Some of the women used their sexuality as a tool for their own pleasure, while others respected their lover and bodies and used their brains to obtain their ultimate goal. These were the wise women of the stories.

Most of the other women who were caught being unfaithful were killed, which again was routine punishment for their deceit. The women who used their brains over their bodies were rewarded with respect and love. Ultimately, Shahrazad, through her lessons in the form of stories, she depicts women as

<https://assignbuster.com/brains-vs-beauty/>

not simply whores and tricksters, but as capable of wit, intelligence, and much more beyond sex and infidelity.