

## A Lacanian Reading of the “Story of King Shahryar and His Brother Shah Zaman”

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### Abstract

Interdisciplinary studies and psychoanalytic criticism have recently opened up new horizons for researchers. *The Thousand and One Nights* has been evaluated in various ways so far, but what has been overlooked is the psychoanalytical dimension of the stories. The context of the “Story of King Shahryar and His Brother Shah Zaman” illustrates a problem unique to civilization, whose examination can provide the readers with insight into latent meanings. Although Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, used to read the works of poets and writers, including fantastic and suprealist stories and claimed that he and those writers were both inspired by the same origin, albeit in two different ways (Shariat Kashani, 2014: 13), psychoanalytic criticism does not have the prominent place it deserves in contemporary literature, or is harshly criticized by those who do not support theorists such as Freud, Lacan, and others. The analytical power of psychoanalysis and its amenity to interpretation led us to decipher the core story of *The Thousand and One Nights* according to Lacan’s theories. Despite their difficulty, Lacan’s theories contain neither the misunderstandings around Freud’s concepts nor the sense of superiority one finds in Jung’s antirealist and mystical psychology. This paper deals with the origins of the story of Shahryar and his brother Shah Zaman from a Lacanian perspective.

**Keywords:** Shahryar, Scheherazade, Psychoanalysis, Lacan, *The Thousand and One Nights*

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Psychoanalysis can help us decipher meanings hidden in texts. Although psychoanalysis and fairy tales and legends are closely connected, *The Thousand and One Nights* has rarely been psychoanalytically analyzed. The present study

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aims to examine the “Story of King Shahryar and His Brother Shah Zaman” in *The Thousand and One Nights* based on Lacan’s ideas. The main theme of the story, which can be considered a reflection of the human psychological structure, is an expression of a process common to all human beings. Shahryar commonly symbolizes collective consciousness and his derangement is caused by an ego that does not function in coordination with the psyche. Shah Zaman’s sophistication does not suffice here as human behavior is lacking in him.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

According to Lacan, human psyche is composed of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real, which are in interaction with each other in the becoming of being. To reveal the imaginary attractions and the symbolic law governing them, Lacan focuses on the distinction between the real and reality (with a symbolic structure). In the “Story of King Shahryar and His Brother Shah Zaman,” King Shahryar and his brother Shah Zaman face the real through a trauma. With the presence of Shahryar the real returns and emerges through the symbolic. Shahryar has to discover the knowledge hidden in the real. Scheherazade teaches him how to face the real by avoiding logic and relying on emotions.

## **3. Methodology**

The library-based research method has been used in the present study to collect the data and a descriptive-analytical approach has been adopted to conduct a psychoanalytical analysis of the data.

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

King Shahryar and his brother, after learning about the affairs of their wives, realize that the collapse of their symbolic world should not lead to a “lack of reality” in them. They take two different paths: Shah Zaman leads an ascetic life and Shahryar tries to kill women. From a Lacanian viewpoint, their mental status is completely different. What Shah Zaman does is to prevent the enjoyment of the other; however, Shahryar tries to ensure the enjoyment of the other, making him never experience the scruples of a psychopath. He assumes that he helps the other derive great enjoyment. The psychopath (Shah Zaman) is the object of the enjoyment of the other and is controlled by the other, while the deviant person serves the other.

## **5. Conclusion**

Shahryar’s attitude toward the other is the same attitude the other adopts toward Shahryar. Here, the deviant person, i.e., Shahryar, is the absolute subject that treats the other’s body as an instrument to satisfy his own desire. Scheherazade, by avoiding logic, teaches Shahryar how to avoid encountering the real. Like a psychoanalyst, Scheherazade criticizes the internal and psychological reality of

Shahrayr by telling stories, proving the reality that in our unconscious we are all murderers. Scheherazade tries to prove Shahryar's innocence, which was a fulfilled hallucination. With the help of the real, Scheherazade proves what would be otherwise the projection of guilt onto another person. In other words, Scheherazade proved that the murdered women were all guilty.

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