

Brian Mullen

Professor Antonio A. Garcia

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The Power of Tales

In *The Thousand and One Nights*, tales are used to deliver a potent rhetoric. The father's story, *The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey*, was to illustrate to his daughter that getting involved and trying to help can often bring one to his or her own bad circumstances. The daughter's story, *The Tale of the Merchant and the Demon*, had an innumerable amount of possibilities for extension in order to delay her death.

With the father's, the vizier's, story, he used metaphors to convey the idea that good will and willingness to help can ironically become one's own burden. It was an ingenious comparison to the fate his daughter would have if she were to volunteer her life in efforts to save countless women in this kingdom. The father says as he makes a stark comparison to the tale of the donkey, "You, my daughter, will likewise perish because of your miscalculation. Desist, sit quietly and don't expose yourself to peril," (562). He feels she will suffer as the donkey did, and thus this metaphoric strategy has been articulated to his daughter.

As the daughter rebels against her father's wishes, she insist on telling the king a story every night about a demon and a merchant who the demon has sworn to kill. The irony with this is that with the methods of the story told by the daughter is that situations kept presenting themselves to postpone the death of the merchant in the story, just like how the actual telling of the stories is postponing the death of the daughter. Every night, the king seems to be overly intrigued to hear what Shahrazad will conclude the story with. He says things like, "By God, I will not have her

put to death until I hear the rest of the story and find out what happened to the merchant with the demon” (570). This greatly fortifies that Shahrazad’s plan is working and the king spares her life each night. It is an enjoyable experience to read how the daughter’s plan is working, and it is most apparent when the king says, “This is an amazing story. I am willing to postpone her execution for even for a month, before having her put to death.” (597). The reader sees now how effective the stories of the daughter are.

Comparatively, the daughter tells a story just like her father did to accomplish a certain motive. The daughter is much more clever than her father realizes. In contrast, their stories possess opposing ideas. The father has told a story in which the good will of a character attempts to help a distressed character, but ends up with misfortune and the burden becomes that of the character attempting to help. With the daughter’s story, there are old men who appear and tell their stories in order to help the merchant and succeed in saving his life. This extreme difference between the father’s and daughter’s stories serve as a symbolic difference in their wit.