

# A MILLENNIUM OF ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS

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## Abstract

No other work of Oriental literature has had such an influence on Europe as the collection of Arabic tales entitled One Thousand and One Nights. It was first translated from the Syrian original into French (*Les Mille et Une Nuits*, 1704–17) by the orientalist Antoine Galland and into English by Richard Burton (*The Thousand Nights and a Night*, 1885–88). The first Slovenian translation is an adaptation: the translator was Filip Lipe Haderlap, and the title was *Tisoč in ena noč: pravljice iz jutrovih dežel* (*One Thousand and One Nights: Fairy Tales from the Lands of the East*, 1880–91). It is a Christianized translation from German based on the Viennese edition (Max Habicht, Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, Carl Schall: *Die Erzählungen der 1001 Nacht aus Tunesien. Arabische Erzählungen* [1825]). In the Slovenian adaptation, Scheherazade is called Lunica, Dinarezada Srebrnica, Sultan Shahryar is Riar, his brother Shahzeman is Senan, and the vizier is a minister. Makalonca (1944) by F. S. Finžgar was also taken from the Arabic collection entitled *Zgodba o Kamar-al-Zamanu in kitajski princesi Badur* (*The Tale of Kamar al-Zaman and the Chinese Princess Badur*), in Haderlap's translation under the title *Historija od princa Krasnobora in od Kitajske princezinje Milene* (*The History of Prince Krasnobor and of the Chinese Princess Milena*). Slovenian readers are most familiar with individual fairy tales (*Aladdin and the Magic Lamp*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *The Thief of Bagdad*, *The Magic Horse*, *Harun al-Rashid*, *The Fisherman and the Genie*, *Open Sesame*, *Sinbad the Sailor*, *The Three Apples*, etc.).

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From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, adult readers projected and masked their desire for fantasy, exoticism, and adventure, which abounded, as the desires of children, thus many titles are similar, e.g. *Tisoč in ena noč: pravljice za mladino, s podobami v barvotisku* (*One Thousand and One Nights: Fairy Tales for Young People, with Images in Colour*, 1902), or as Seifert put it: *Infantile text, Adult context*),<sup>1</sup> which also applies to many other fairy tales, the *Bible*, *Gulliver*, *Robinson*, *One Thousand and One Nights*, etc., that could be called the classics of world literature.

<sup>1</sup> Seifert, L. C. (2006). *Fairy Tales, Sexuality, and Gender in France, 1690–1715*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The setting is the Near, Middle, and Far East, and the first associations with the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection are exoticism, orientalism and love scenes such as utopia (Arcadia, idyll, paradise, Eden) or therapy for disappointed adults.<sup>2</sup> Tales from the *One Thousand and One Nights* according to S. Freud enable 'daydreaming,' and active imagination according to C.G. Jung.<sup>3</sup> The collection of Arabic fairy tales is rich in archetypal motifs and enables the method of active imagination, which is motivated by daydreaming, visual images and imagination. The characteristic of *One Thousand and One Nights* is the wealth of stories, imagination, magical props (pearls, magical words, magical flight, jewels, genie in a bottle, flying suitcases, flying carpets, garden, etc.), love scenes, violence, etc.

The collection of fairy tales with the title *The Arabian Nights*, also known under the popular title *One Thousand and One Nights*, was created in the Middle Ages and is based on various sources. It represents a book of books, or rather; it is a collection of different stories, which are united by a framework story about Sultan Shahryar and the vizier's daughter Scheherazade, who tells stories to the king. The basic goal of storytelling is the emotional and social literacy of patriarchal authority.<sup>4</sup> Shahryar, who is characterized by double standards, carries out subjective, objective and systemic violence against women. He is portrayed as a pathological narcissist who rules over a permissive society. His authority is institutionalized, he personifies the cruel side of universal law, and he implements it by punishing society or just women, supposedly motivated by the 'deceit' of his own wife; these criteria do not apply to him, since he himself embodies the law.<sup>5</sup>

The bearer of progress is Scheherazade, or the female principle, who through the telling of fairy tales/stories teaches her sister as a role model, and the king by example... with 365 fairy tales told during 1001 nights, which is a metaphor for the process of emotional and social literacy or the re-education of patriarchal authority. Unlike the submissive and passive women, Scheherazade chooses the active principle and opts for cultural literacy. Authority is literate through culture, art, not by royal or state decree, but based on an internal imperative. But why with literature, fiction, storytelling, stories? Precisely because reading/listening to fiction, unlike not reading or reading non-fiction, enables different perspectives, pluralism of interpretations, understanding of others, complex social relations. The latest research in the field of

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<sup>2</sup> A sort of storytelling therapy for frustrated adults: Rose, Jacqueline (1984). *The case of Peter Pan, or, impossibility of children's fiction*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>3</sup> Jung, Carl Gustav; Kerényi, Carl (1993). *Essays on a Science of Mythology. The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Žižek, S. (1985). "Patološki narcis" kot družbeno-nujna forma subjektivnosti. *Družboslovne razprave*, year 2, no. 2, pp. 105-141.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

neuroscience says that it is precisely fiction with its complexity, aesthetics, literariness, style and artistry that develops thinking (Theory of Mind).<sup>6</sup>

Intertextually, it is a motif in Plato's *Republic* (Book 10) which is still relevant today, i.e. whether there is room for culture (poets, storytellers, artists) in society. Similarly, Aesop wonders itself in the fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper* whether work is only physical (ant) or is dealing with music/art also work. The grasshopper (the artist) used music to help the ants (workers) to work more easily, so it would be reasonable to expect reciprocity. It is about Ovid's myth *Orpheus and Eurydice*: can Orpheus defeat death with the lyre (art) or can art sensitize the trickster (compare Ivo Andrić, *Aska and the Wolf*).

In the *International Index of Fairy Tales*, there is an international type of fairy tale classified as ATU<sup>7</sup> 875\*B *Narration Saves the Wife from Death (Scheherazade)*.<sup>8</sup> From an Eurocentric point of view, framework stories of the type *Narration Saves the Wife from Death* were popular already in the period before Christ, when via the Indo-European route arrived the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Panchatantra*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, etc. came.

*One Thousand and One Nights* is a book that contains an entire library, a millennium and a collection of Arabic fairy tales; it's a phenomenon in world literature that has influenced fiction and media (e.g. film, music, literature) that only emphasize exoticism, but not other layers of complex text.

After a thousand years, Scheherazade is still an example for women both in the Orient and elsewhere in the world; we live in a society based on knowledge, knowledge is a public good and "without knowledge things are difficult," while "with knowledge they are easy." M. Luthi says that the fairy-tale hero is essentially a traveller: the action line of *One Thousand and One Nights* is unfolding before our eyes, carried by individual characters and the framework character – Scheherazade. The collection of Arabic fairy tales also has all the characteristics of a European fairy tale (one-dimensionality, flatness, abstraction, isolation and universality, sublimation and all-inclusiveness),<sup>9</sup> since European fairy tales were created precisely from oriental ones.

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<sup>6</sup> Available on <http://scottbarrykaufman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Science-2013Kidd-science.1239918.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The Arne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) Index began to emerge at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when folklorists A. Arne (1910) and S. Thompson (1928, 1961) classified fairy-tale motifs. Arne and Thompson's classification of motifs was updated by H.J. Uther (2004, 2011) and is now called the ATU Index. It is an international designation or acronym based on the surnames of three folklorists: A (ntti Arne), (Stith) T(hompson), (Hans Jorg) U(ther), who published an internationally classified index of fairy tale types.

<sup>8</sup> Uther, H. J. (2011). *The Types of International Folktales, a Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Arne and Stith Thompson*. Helsinki: Helsinki Suomalainen Tiedekatemia = Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

<sup>9</sup> Luthi, Max (2012). *Evropska pravljica, narava in oblika*. Ljubljana: Založba Sophia.

The active Scheherazade can be compared to passive European fairy-tale characters, which J. Zipes calls "comatose heroines."<sup>10</sup> These are *The Little Mermaid*, *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*<sup>11</sup> etc., who are waiting for a man who mostly brought them "from happiness to misfortune" (e.g. wolf) to also save them "from misfortune to happiness" (e.g. hunter) or from "sleep." Scheherazade, unlike the linear Hollywood super-women, who solve their lack of imagination with conceit, is active, talented and socially intelligent.

V. Propp also distinguishes two types of heroes in the *Morphology of the Folktale*: the hero victim and/or the hero seeker. The millennial archetype of Scheherazade is a modern heroine who seeks solutions and does not enjoy the role of victim. Not only does she save her life and the life of her little sister, she also saves her gender and her art. A characteristic of contemporary Slovenian (youth) literature is the dominance of heroes who defend themselves with apathy, anti-intellectualism and hedonism.

Scheherazade is not only a feminist symbol, but an expression of art, freedom of expression and language, which is not only a means of expression, but also a "house of being" (M. Heidegger). In the process of emotional, cultural and social literacy, which lasts 1001 nights, Scheherazade socializes the Sultan; he finds that Eros is stronger than Thanatos and that killing is not the answer to life. Scheherazade can also be understood as a work of art for each of us who needs free time, "a room of our own" (V. Woolf), imagination, art that can "disinterestedly please us" (I. Kant), but we can understand love as medicine (S. Freud) or storytelling as healing (C. P. Estés), which finds the meaning of life in life itself, stories, descriptions of stories and narratives, not in shortening the lives of others.

The universal message can be: Scheherazade is a paradigm for women who non-violently resist patriarchal domination by traveling from the selfish gene to the selfless meme (R. Dawkins), as she gives life to her sister, women, and culture.

The collection of fairy tales *One Thousand and One Nights* should also be viewed from the point of view of Orientalism, which E.W. Said discusses in his 1978 monograph *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Even the stories from *One Thousand and One Nights* are viewed in a binary way, which must be transcended and the Orient should be thought of in a post-colonialist way. Postcolonialism was influenced by the comparatist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay entitled *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in which she also discusses the motif of Scheherazade and *One Thousand and One Nights*,

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<sup>10</sup> Zipes, Jack (2012). Fairy Tales, Child Abuse, and "Childism".

Available via: <http://www.ias.umn.edu/2012/11/15/zipes-jack>

<sup>11</sup> Zipes, Jack (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: the Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

namely as the motif of "one thousand and one voices,"<sup>12</sup> when she writes about thinking women like Scheherazade. He further advocates the concept of decolonization of patriarchal discourse and a different view of Scheherazade which he cites as an example. Although *One Thousand and One Nights* is based on Arab culture, we can understand that the characters in the fairy tale are without geographical, personal and material environment, therefore they are universal.

Ancient Philomena was literally and metaphorically left speechless, so she wove her stories into carpets, and medieval Scheherazade was saved from death by storytelling; culture is one of the modern ways to get out of crisis and/or recession. *One Thousand and One Nights* is an all-inclusive literary content and form in the true sense of the word, as it reflects all essential elements of human being.

The collection of Arabic fairy tales *One Thousand and One Nights* was created at a similar time as the oldest document of Slovenian written culture *Freising Manuscripts* (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries); both texts are the birth certificates of two simultaneous cultures on two different continents in the same millennium.

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<sup>12</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In: NELSON, C.; GROSSBERG, L. (eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313.

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