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A Phantasmagoric Fairy Tale: "Zerinda" and the Doubling of Wonder

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> *"I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again." – C. S. Lewis*

Fairy tales are frequently viewed as purely for children, yet they can hold value for adults as well. C. S. Lewis understood this dual audience for fairy tales, and used this knowledge to craft stories, such as the *Chronicles of Narnia*, that have broad appeal for adults and children alike. Another such audience-bridging story is "Zerinda—A Fairy Tale," a largely forgotten British fairy tale found in Maria Jane Jewsbury's Romantic miscellany *Phantasmagoria: Sketches of Life and Literature* (1825). "Zerinda" straddles and complicates the divides of child and adult audiences in its use of innocent, childlike wonder and rigid, adult hegemony. In this tale, Jewsbury uses heteroglossia to build a world of wonder. Heteroglossia is a term from Mikhail Bakhtin that essentially means multiple voices or polyvocality. The idea is that different voices are present in all texts, and that these include the voice of the author along with the voices of the individual

characters, the narrator, and occasional others. This paper explores the tensions of innocent wonder and experienced hegemony within "Zerinda," and examines how Jewsbury uses phantasmagoria, various types of humor, and the heteroglossia of the text that signals an appeal to both adults and children.

Maria Jane Jewsbury's 1825 *Phantasmagoria; or, Sketches of Life and Literature* is a two-volume collection capturing varied thematic concerns of its time while offering self-critique, allowing the text to reflect and comment upon Romantic civilization's polyvocality while simultaneously embodying it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines phantasmagoria as a "vision of a rapidly transforming collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms, such as may be experienced in a dream or fevered state, or evoked by literary description" ("Phantasmagoria," def. 2). This vision-like quality is present throughout *Phantasmagoria*, and in "Zerinda" specifically. Jewsbury's work is intensely concerned with print culture, and particularly with ideas of readership and the importance of readers to literature, Romanticism, and the miscellany. These concerns enhance the heteroglot nature of the text generally and highlight the links between heteroglossia, phantasmagoria, and wonder evident in "Zerinda" and present in varying degrees throughout *Phantasmagoria*.

Understanding the material location of "Zerinda—a Fairy Tale" furthers the importance of heteroglossia to the text, given the nature of the larger work in which it is found. *Phantasmagoria* is a miscellany, essentially a collection of poetry, short fiction, essays, anecdotes, and, in this case, literary criticism. Abigail Williams describes eighteenth-century miscellanies as follows: "Many poems were published individually, but they went on to enjoy an afterlife in the miscellany culture of the period. Poetic miscellanies are vital to understanding the diversity of eighteenth-century literary culture, reflecting fashions, popular taste, and the literary market" (166). *Phantasmagoria* differs slightly from these more purely poetic, eighteenth-century miscellanies, but is developed out of that tradition. The nature of the miscellany in combining work from various genres and authors resonates strongly with Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia and dialogism. The linkages between Jewsbury's miscellany and Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia highlight the collected, or cultivated, nature of "Zerinda" within *Phantasmagoria*. The collected nature of a miscellany creates a tighter resonance between "Zerinda" and the collected and translated tales that Jennifer Schacker discusses, illuminating the heteroglossia of these collections of fairy tales.

This shared feature of collection, and the heteroglossia that entails, suggests that something about the polyvocality (or multiple voices) is intrinsic to nineteenth-century British fairy tales.

This polyvocality, and its connection to wonder, is related to the idea of phantasmagoria, as illuminated by Jewsbury's choice of title. As highlighted in the previously cited definition, phantasmagoria could serve as a definition of wonder—a "vision of a rapidly transforming collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms," "evoked by literary description" ("Phantasmagoria," def. 2). Again, "collection" is important to the ideas at play. It suggests heteroglossia, but perhaps more interestingly, also alludes to an agent who collected the tales or forms. The presence of the agent suggests that there is a motive for the collecting, and therefore motivations to examine behind the bringing about of wonder and hegemony. The hegemony and wonder exist without the agent per say, but the existence of an agent provides another entry into the analysis of that wonder that is being used.

In "Zerinda," Jewsbury creates a distinctive persona for the text, while also writing what functions on some level as two stories—one intended for adults and one intended for children. Indeed, what Jewsbury does is described aptly in Bakhtin's description of heteroglossia:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)

Creating the persona of a narrator allows Jewsbury to distinguish her "authorial speech" from "the speeches of narrators" as well as the "speech of characters," all of which function together to create the atmosphere of heteroglossia. In "Zerinda," this heteroglossia is even more complex as the narrator expresses multiple voices without the need for other characters.

Schacker finds this same heteroglossia in the tales she examines in *National Dreams*. In discussing Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, Schacker writes, "In the collected tales and notes, Croker has blurred the distinction—which had initially seemed so clear—between

oral and literary storytellers, listeners and readers, reflecting on the art of storytelling" (56). Schacker argues that Croker tells these stories with multiple, blurred voices. As she examines specific tales, it becomes clear that Croker tells most of the stories as if he is relaying them directly as he heard or transcribed them; however, there are frequently odd interjections where the narrator of the tale seems to shift into Croker, rather than remaining the "old woman" that he points to as the origin of all these sorts of stories. Jewsbury's appeals to children and adults throughout "Zerinda" similarly blur these lines, winking at part of the audience (perhaps those doing the telling), while also acknowledging the other listening audience.

The doubling of appeal is most evident through textual examination. A brief plot overview of "Zerinda" is likely useful given the tale's virtually unknown nature. "Zerinda" is the story of a princess, Zerinda, who at birth is granted extreme beauty along with a fault selected by her mother—vanity. The Fairy that granted the wish returns when Zerinda turns twenty-one. However, prior to that day, both her parents die. Zerinda then interacts with the Fairy, confronts her vanity, undergoes a radical transformation, and rules in peace and prosperity for decades. Jewsbury describes the Queen's reason for choosing vanity as Zerinda's one fault as follows: "Vanity was the fault she selected, for she determined, after a few minutes reflection on the subject, that vanity was such an amiable, well-bred fault,—merely a feminine weakness,—a trivial speck in character,—that it was really uncharitable to consider it a fault" (254). The gender commentary here is worthy of a full examination on its own (as is the tale itself), though that particularly route is not the most fruitful for our exploration of heteroglossia. There is undoubtedly humor in this passage beyond the sexist commentary, and that intonation could signal humor to children even though the text itself suggests a more adult audience here.

Understandably then, a consideration of the audience of "Zerinda" seems fruitful in determining the heteroglossia present in the text and the potentially competing ways that wonder is functioning. Shavit notes that "since the child was perceived in any case as a source of amusement, adults could enjoy elements of the child's world while openly or covertly considering them part of the world of children, part of a culture different from that of the upper classes" (323). Adults were able in part to enjoy this world of wonder that was primarily aimed at children because children were viewed as a source of amusement for adults. Indeed, the fairy tale may

depend on this relationship that inherently is one of heteroglossia. There will always be multiple voices—the voice for the child, the voice for the adult, the voice of wonder, the voice of hegemony. "Zerinda" occupies an odd liminal space given this assertion about fairy tales and the tale's moralizing and didactic tone.

Indeed, the framing of *Phantasmagoria* as a whole is suggestive of an intended adult audience. The book opens with a quote from Wordsworth on the title page, before the dedication, which reads, "To William Wordsworth, Esquire, these volumes are most respectfully inscribed as a testimony of grateful feeling, for the high delight, and essential benefit, which the author has derived from the study of his poems." This dedication is followed on the next page by a poem written by Jewsbury (signed simply, MJJ) to Wordsworth. The book is clearly meant to be for Wordsworth—a love letter of sorts to him and his poetry, contained in a variety of sketches. This focus on Wordsworth suggests an adult audience, who would have read and been familiar with Wordsworth rather than a primarily child audience.

This confusion about audience is only deepened by a closer look at the tale. Perhaps this is because the wonder of the fairy tale is linked with the hegemony that it exercises. Bacchilega notes that "the fairy tale's dominant or hegemonic association has been with magic and enchantment" (5). Magic and enchantment evoke wonder, and are suggestive of the phantasmagoric visions that "Zerinda" strives to inspire. However, it is important to recognize that "hegemonic and counterhegemonic uses of the fairy tale are not in binary opposition to each other" (107). Not only are wonder and hegemony not in binary opposition to one another, but the appeals to children and adults are not binaries. In fact, the relationship between the two seems to complicate the dichotomy between child and adult that we have embraced.

The child-adult dichotomy can be traced to early beliefs about fairy tales and childhood's sole ownership of imagination and make-believe. Warner writes that "The Romantic vision of childhood led to the triumph of the imagination, but also to the belief that the faculty of make-believe was a child's special privilege. . . . Grown-ups yearned to regain that paradise—the land of the lost boys—and evoking this secondary world became a powerful spur to new fairytale fictions" (103). For Warner, adults yearn to "regain that paradise," yet they seem perpetually distanced from it. However, texts like "Zerinda" bridge some of that gap—bringing wonder to adults as well as to children to suggest that the imagination of adults is not that different after

all. This may be because "the further back one goes self-mockery and fairy tale have been deeply interwoven" (Warner 148). The adult sense of wonder is often tied up in self-mockery, in an awareness of what is expected or how the tale differs starkly from reality. This sense of self-mockery feels present throughout "Zerinda," but a brief moment will serve to illustrate it: "For a full hour she wept without ceasing, not entirely for the loss of the diamond mine, though diamonds justify any woman in weeping" (265–66). The humor here would likely be lost on the youngest children, or those engaging with the wonder of the story, but would be present for adult readers. The language is also visual—creating a rough sketch of imaginary forms, invoking the phantasmagoria that seems to define the wonder of the tale.

This sense of self-mockery may be viewed slightly differently, perhaps due to the heteroglossia of the tale and the adult/child divide. Shavit quotes Warner concerning the illustrations of the Grimm Brothers' tales in England, that "Fairy tales shifted to a comic register—'pills for melancholy' . . . Cruikshank set a mood of jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense" (105). The combination of visual storytelling with "jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense" that was meant to protect, educate, and mold seems to result in a unique outcome that is reflected in "Zerinda." As Jewsbury describes Zerinda's vanity, some of this "jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense" comes through. "During childhood and youth, vanity developed itself in its usual forms; but as she approached womanhood, its exhibitions became so enormous and ridiculous, that the envious were hourly gratified with the exposure of her folly, and the charitable were constrained to hope she was insane" (Jewsbury 255). The description starts off fairly standard, but again shifts into a comic register towards the end. The gratification of the envious is a little surprising, but not incredibly so. However, the idea that "the charitable were constrained to hope she was insane" is guffaw-inducing though admittedly displaying an insensitivity to those with real, debilitating mental disorders. If seen as "jolly good fun, or silly, whacky nonsense" this seems to be appealing to children, yet if viewed as "self-mockery" the appeal is to adults.

Another instance serves to further suggest the jolly good fun of "Zerinda." As a consequence of her vanity, she is displeased with the bards and minstrels and poets. The text notes that "In time she tired out the tuneful tribe,—for they found it impossible to invent any fiction which Zerinda considered sufficiently true" (256). These creators could not develop "any fiction which Zerinda considered sufficiently true." Given that the tale is found in a

book and that there are some efforts to maintain the historicity of the story, Jewsbury's comment here feels like a wink to knowing readers and other writers that they may be critiqued at times for failing to produce fictions that are "sufficiently true," but that those who question the veracity of the fictions are simply too vain to realize what they are missing. The joke seems aimed at the adult audience, straddling the line that Warner suggests fairy tales frequently do, forcing readers to live in a liminal space caught "between accepting them [wonders and enchantments] (as the ideal child reader does) and rejecting them (as the adult reader can be expected to do)" (150). The idea of sufficiently true fictions speaks to an audience that feels compelled to both accept and reject the wonder that is being displayed, again invoking a sense of self-mockery. Sufficiently true fictions also speak to the heteroglossia of the text which is sincere and moralizing, while simultaneously being self-aware and self-deprecating.

In addition to humor of either the jolly good fun or self-mocking variety, wonder in tales was targeted towards children through illustrations. Warner writes that "the illustrated book is an essential dynamic in the history of fairy tale, for since the nineteenth century the stories have been principally transmitted through visual storytelling" (98). While Warner is talking about book illustrations here, it seems that this emphasis may have demanded that fairy tales become a staple of television and film, two strongly visual mediums of narrative storytelling (and perhaps part of the reason that Disney has become the representation of fairy tale for many today). Yet, "Zerinda," a nineteenth-century fairy tale, does not have any specific visual component beyond the use of figurative language to create mental images. In fact, Jewsbury seems to go out of her way to downplay possible visual elements in a few key instances. In the tale, she writes:

> It is now time to say something of Zerinda herself. As every one has a different standard of beauty, instead of giving any detailed account of her personal charms, I shall simply state that she was the most beautiful creature ever shone upon by sun or moon, and then, each of my readers can imagine her beautiful after his own taste. (254–55)

Jewsbury not only chooses not to describe Zerinda or her beauty, but explicitly informs the audience that she is refusing to do so, in order for the audience to create their own mental image of her. Here, Jewsbury also explicitly references a male reader. This may be simply due to conventions of the time,

or perhaps is suggesting that Jewsbury intended the tale for boys rather than girls. The moralizing nature of the tale and the frequent references to the feminine nature of vanity complicate this intended audience, but the gender concerns are likely best suited for a separate discussion.

The labeling of the pieces within *Phantasmagoria* as "sketches" strikes me as worth examining in relation to the importance of illustrations and the nature of phantasmagoria. While "Zerinda" and the other stories and articles are not themselves illustrated, they are described in language that evokes illustration—albeit hasty and preliminary—but illustration nonetheless. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines "sketch" as "rough drawing or delineation of something" ("Sketch," def. 1) There's an emphasis on roughness here, the suggestion that what is seen is only the beginnings of what could be. As "phantasmagoria" is a "rapidly transforming" vision of a "collection or series of imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms" this roughness evoked by the sketches seems fitting. The rough outline allows for readers' imagination to fill in, fully inviting the phantasmagoric vision of wonder. The OED later defines sketch as Jewsbury likely intended it, as "A brief account, description, or narrative giving the main or important facts, incidents, etc., and not going into the details; a short or superficial essay or study, freq. in pl. as a title" ("Sketch," def. 2). Even though this is undoubtedly Jewsbury's intended primary meaning, the layers of meaning created in part by the use of heteroglossia, are evocative.

"Zerinda's" lack of illustrations complicates any assertions to a purely or primarily child audience and highlights some of the complicated power dynamics between the adult and child audiences. Cristina Bacchilega notes that "Story power flows—though not equally—in more than one direction" (74). Jewsbury seems determined to play with the flow of story power by shifting between adult and child, wonder and hegemony. As she describes a source of information for the tale, she writes, "Indeed, the annals of the kingdom (to which, as rather apocryphal I have not paid much attention) hint" (260). Jewsbury here relates some information about Zerinda, but does so in a fashion that would likely not be of interest to most children, instead playing with adult expectations. The adult can be expected to reject the ideas of wonder and Jewsbury knowingly incorporates some of that skepticism into her tale, appealing to that adult reader or the adult tendencies of readers.

The heteroglossia at work throughout "Zerinda" allows for a doubling of audience—appealing to both and adults. Wonder and awe are used in

a winking fashion throughout "Zerinda" to suggest Jewsbury's awareness of this double-audience and the complicated nature of the adult-child dichotomy. As Warner argues "fairy tale, while aimed especially at modern children, hovered as a form of literature between them and adults" (104). The heteroglossia present in "Zerinda" highlights this hovering. The humor used throughout the story evokes varied responses from adults and children. Wonder is brought into the tale through its rough descriptions and sketch-like qualities, that allow it to more effectively function phantasmagorically, suggesting visions of "imaginary (and usually fantastic) forms" to readers. "Zerinda" highlights the relationship between self-mockery and fairy tale, suggesting that wonder is found in both and that the fusion of the two can serve as expanding the audience of fairy tales. The moralizing of "Zerinda" is made resonant for adults by the way that the tale's self-mockery and absurdity undermine the very moral that the tale is arguing for. The heteroglossia within "Zerinda" brings wonder to adults and children through less neatly defined uses of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

The reception of the tale is still unclear, though it appears to be remarkably unknown, and could work to trace the influence and impact that the tale has had, beyond republication in an anthology of forgotten moral fairy tales from the nineteenth century in 2010. Further work could be done exploring the nationalism in "Zerinda," as well the text's relationship to other fairy tales, including another tale that features a character like Zerinda prominently. A feminist reading of the tale could yield interesting insights, particularly given Jewsbury's efforts to appear masculine as the author and the satirical tone that she uses in other sketches and may be in place throughout "Zerinda." Further analyses of "Zerinda" could shed light on how wonder has been used to appeal to both children and adults in fairy tales and other stories. Gender dynamics, class issues, or other angles could also provide further insight into the intersections of these various issues. "Zerinda" in particular is useful in such analyses because its unknown nature allows it to be seen afresh. The text is also longer than other fairy tales and is more clearly working towards appealing to both adults and children (something present in most fairy tales, but not always as obviously working as it is throughout "Zerinda").

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