

Toto Too

The Wizard of Oz
by L. Frank Baum

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J. Peter Gallagher
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Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's 1939 classic "The Wizard of Oz" was not the first attempt at a movie version of L. Frank Baum's book The Wizard of Oz. There have been several movie and Broadway productions of the book. But none of these ever had the impact of MGM's movie. MGM's movie held its audience captive by its color extravagance. The movie has been shown in theatres and on national television since its release. On deeper investigation, though, we find that although the scriptwriters went to the original text for the movies' lines, there are major differences between the two. The major difference is MGM's portrayal of Dorothy Gale's trip to Oz, as a dream. Baum writes of her trip as a real journey. From this point we can find many other differences. What we find similar is the way MGM portrays each character. On the surface they may appear different between the book and the movie; but we see in both that the characters are searching for a gift that they always had. As we shall see, the characters don't realize this and the Wizard of Oz must point this out to them. I will first examine the dream versus reality of the book and the movie. From this I want to move to the similarities I see in the two.

We know for a fact that in Baum's book Dorothy is carried off to Oz by means of a cyclone. This also occurs in the movie. But in the book the cyclone sets the house down in Oz. A surface following of the movie shows the same. But, in the end of the movie we discover that all this time Dorothy has been "out cold" from a knock on the head. Likewise, we discover that she never left Kansas, indeed, she never left her bed. All the travels in Oz, we find out, were a dream.

Sigmund Freud tells us in his writings that our dreams are the fulfillment of our wishes. For example, a sleeper has a premonition of death, a situation in which he is likely to be set in a grave. The sleeper's dream-work selects

a condition in which the premonition of death turns to a fulfillment of a wish: perhaps the sleeper has stumbled into the passageway to an Egyptian pyramid and has laid open vast treasures, thus fulfilling his archeological hopes. In the same way, Dorothy dreams of Oz as a place where she won't get in anyone's way. The opening scene of the movie helps this setting: Dorothy has arrived home with a great problem, Toto her dog has bitten Miss Gulch again. Dorothy also find everyone extremely busy, so busy that at one point Aunt Em tells her to find a place where she won't get in anybody's way.¹

We might also see her trip to Oz as the fulfillment of Dorothy's anger towards Miss Gulch. Miss Gulch takes away Toto with the intent of destroying him. Dorothy's anger at Miss Gulch may be fulfilled when Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch. As a helpful note, in the movie Miss Gulch becomes the Wicked Witch of Dorothy's dream. Likewise, the three farmhands become the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion in Dorothy's dream.

Freud also points out that often times people whom we are in constant contact with will appear in our dreams. We can see this working in Dorothy's dream of Oz. As I pointed out in the previous paragraph, Miss Gulch becomes the Wicked Witch. Let me explain what I mean when I say "becomes". Watching the movie we see that the person who portrays the character Miss Gulch also portrays the character of the Wicked Witch of the West. This is true for all the other major characters. The three farmhands become three of the major characters Dorothy meets. In "real life," before the cyclone, each farmhand has the same characteristics as their subsequent characters in Oz. One man acts bravely until Dorothy falls in the pig pen, then he panics--but saves her. Another farmhand is telling Dorothy she "has to use her head about Miss Gulch".² Soon after he says this he hits his hand with a hammer while

he fixes a wagon. The third farmhand is a likeable man who is always helping out anyone who needs help. A fourth man is introduced shortly before Dorothy's dream begins. This is Professor Marvel, a traveling magician. Professor Marvel, understandably, becomes the Great and Powerful, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. But interestingly enough, he is also the door-man to the Emerald City, the driver of the horse-of-a-different-color, and the guard at the Wizard's palace. All of these three characters in one represent in some way the authority of the Wizard and in this way fit into the interpretation of the dream.

We see, then, that in many ways the movie's portrayal of Dorothy's trip to Oz as a dream is a valid interpretation. The dream fulfills in two ways Dorothy's wishes. On the one hand, the land of Oz is a place where Dorothy won't get in anybody's way. On the other hand, Dorothy fulfills her anger toward Miss Gulch by melting her as the Wicked Witch.

There are other interesting differences between the book and the movie. For instance; when Dorothy meets each character in the book they tell her their life's story up to the time she meets them. In the movie, each time she meets a character, either the Scarecrow, the Tinman, or the Lion, it is as if they have known each other all their lives. In fact in one scene Dorothy says . . . "its as if I've known you all my life",³ yet she knows she couldn't have for she has never been to Oz before, and they have never been to Kansas. Following the movie closely, one sees this is the first time we get a hint that perhaps all of this is but a dream. If one has watched the movie many times he can see that the characters are one and the same and that they all have met before, in Kansas. Another difference is the fact that the movie leaves out a large number of the traveling experiences of Dorothy and her friends to Oz and to the Wicked Witch's castle. No mention is even

made of the China land, the Kalidahs, the Quadlings, and other interesting people of Oz. Also left out are the green glasses which give the Emerald City its green color. The movie makes up for this by making the Emerald City as green as it can, but a part of Baum's theme is lost by leaving out the sense of an illusion which the green glasses create. This sub-theme of illusion, in conjunction with the dream of the movie, is further implicated in the book. Both the movie and the book put forth a similar illusion. I am speaking of the fact that the Scarecrow, the Tinman, the Lion, and possibly Dorothy, all appear to need the Wizard to receive their wish for brains, a heart, courage, and a home. What we shall see is that each character always had the thing they sought from the Wizard of Oz. What the Wizard gives them is but a talisman of the gift they have always had. What I want to do now is turn to the book primarily, using the book as an aid to more clearly demonstrate a point. At the onset I want to emphasize that this theme is easily seen in both the book and the movie.

The first Ozite introduced to the reader is the Scarecrow. In both the book and the movie he is introduced shortly after Dorothy leaves Munchkin City. In the movie, Dorothy encounters a fork in the road and the Scarecrow is pointing one way. Dorothy wonders which way to go and the Scarecrow says one way. Amazed, Dorothy asks why and the Scarecrow points and tells her another way. Dorothy asks why he doesn't know and the Scarecrow replies, "I don't know, I haven't any brains."⁴ The viewer sees this is wrong when the Scarecrow tells Dorothy how to get him down from his pole. Dorothy and the Scarecrow meet similarly in the book. Again, the reader sees the Scarecrow has a brain because he tells Dorothy how to get him down off the pole. Throughout the rest of the story there are numerous examples of the Scarecrow's wisdom, despite his "lack" of a brain.

On the journey to Oz we see both in the book and in the movie that the Scarecrow gains knowledge through experience. Dorothy's statement in chapter three that, "If Oz will not give you any brains you will be no worse off than you are now." turns out, in the end, to be rather prophetic.⁵ This shows that after the Scarecrow gains his experience, he does not need the Wizard. But, as we see, the Scarecrow does need the Wizard for the much needed symbol of his brains. If the Wizard refuses the Scarecrow's request, he still has his experiences which have led him to his knowledge.⁶

We, in many ways, are like the Scarecrow. Men need signs and symbols in their daily existence. Aristotle once said that man does not know himself except by his acts. Aristotle claimed that the mind is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as objects are, but it (the mind) understands other things not by means of their essences but by means of likenesses of them. Neither, therefore, does the mind understand itself by its own essence. Man only knows himself as he knows objects; he cannot know himself through himself. It seems that the mind knows itself through some species, for as St. Thomas Aquinas says, "Our intellect understands nothing without a phantasm [phantasm being something of one of the five sense experiences]. But it (the mind) cannot receive a phantasm of the very essence of the soul. Therefore, our mind must understand itself through some other species extracted from Phantasm."⁷ What all this comes down to is: the Scarecrow needs the Wizard's symbol of his brain to ever have a brain, likewise, man needs symbols to understand different things. As we will see, this holds true for the Tinman, the Lion, and Dorothy.

The next character encountered on the journey to Oz is the Tinman. The Tinman is an interesting character in that we find out that he started out as a flesh and blood man. But because of his love for a princess and an evil

enchantment on his axe from the Wicked Witch of the East, the Tinman's axe cuts off his legs, arms, and head. A friendly tinsmith makes tin replacements.⁸ The Tinman loses his heart when the witch puts another spell on his axe. This time it

. . . made my axe slip again, so it cut right through my body. Once more the tinner . . . made me a body of tin . . . But alas! I had now no heart.⁹

Now we know how the tinman lost his heart. But, knowing better, we soon see that he has a heart bigger than anyone.

While the Scarecrow, the Tinman, Dorothy, and the Lion are continuing their journey, the Tinman steps on a bug. He sheds many tears for this and he eventually rusts his jaws shut. He becomes frantic to get help, but neither Dorothy nor the Lion understand. It is the Scarecrow who understands the Tinman and reaches for the oil can. Afterwards, the Tinman announces, "This will serve me a lesson."¹⁰ The Tinman's kindness and sensibility are beyond most people with hearts.¹¹

We can see that the Tinman is a very sentimental person, yet he lacks a heart. Not until he receives his heart from the Wizard of Oz does the Tinman think he has kindness. Here we see another example of the character looking for a symbol of his gift. Again, this mirrors man's need for a sign to understand that which he does not know.

Perhaps the most endearing character from the movie version by MCM is the Cowardly Lion. In the movie the Lion is a source of great humor. It is in his humorous scenes that we see his cowardice. At one point he faints when he meets the Wizard. At another point he leaps through a window to get away from the Wizard. In this character in the book we find similar traits as in the Scarecrow and the Tinman. The Lion's first act of bravery

comes when our friends meet a large ditch. After figuring the only way to cross the ditch is for the Lion to carry them across, the Lion forges on and carries all across on his back. Before the first jump the Lion says, "I am terribly afraid of falling myself, but I suppose there is nothing to do but try it."¹²

The Cowardly Lion fails like the Scarecrow and the Tinman, to recognize that in the face of danger he is the group's protector. The Cowardly Lion needs the Wizard to give him courage. Once the Wizard grants the Lion a drink of courage, the Cowardly Lion becomes the Courageous Lion.

The final character to examine is Dorothy Gale from Kansas. Dorothy presents a special case. Throughout the story Dorothy is searching for a way back to Kansas. Once she reaches the Wizard of Oz, he promises to take her home in a balloon. But when the balloon takes off without Dorothy, the Wizard has failed to come through for Dorothy. To the reader it seems that Dorothy is stranded in Oz forever and the Wizard of Oz has not lived up to his promise. But Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, steps in and fills the shoes of the Wizard. It is Glinda who explains to Dorothy that she has always had the power to go home in her silver (ruby) slippers. Here we also discover one of Dorothy's unknown tasks, Had she not been blown to Oz, her friends claim, " . . . I should not have had my wonderful brains . . . My wonderful heart . . . I would have lived a coward all my life."¹³ Without Dorothy, none of her friends would have made it to Oz. In the end, however, Dorothy gets her wish and she returns to Kansas.

From this last scene we can see that Dorothy, like her companions, always had the ability to do what they wanted.¹⁴ In this, then, we see the similar experiences that Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion all come from.

As pointed out earlier, each character gains his gift through experience. It also comes to mind that the journey itself is as integral as the Wizard himself. It is through their journey to Oz that each character learns how to use the gift each sought from the Wizard of Oz. Again, when Dorothy says the Scarecrow would be no worse off if Oz did not give him his brains, she does not realize the full impact of that statement. Through the journey, the Scarecrow learns how to use the gift he is seeking from the Wizard. This is likewise true for all other members on their journey.¹⁵

Let us now turn to the one person whom all the characters needed to realize their own gifts--the Great and Powerful and Terrible Wizard of Oz. Dorothy and her friends at first see the Wizard as a great and powerful and terrible being. Their experience of Emerald City only helps to enliven this idea of the Wizard. Their first encounter with the Wizard again fortifies this image. When they return to Oz, after having killed the Wicked Witch, they again meet the Wizard. But this time they also discover who he really is. Frustrated at the delays of the Wizard, the Lion lets go a violent roar. Little Toto, Dorothy's dog, knocks over a screen in the throne room and exposes a little, old man. When asked who he is, he replies, "I am Oz, the Great and Terrible."¹⁶ Much to the chagrin of Dorothy and her friends he does turn out to be Oz. At this Dorothy explains, "I think you are a very bad man.", the Wizard replies, "Oh no my dear, I'm really a very good man; but I'm a very bad wizard, I must admit."¹⁷ When the Wizard says this he changes from the Great and Powerful Oz to Professor Marvel the traveling magician, a plain old human being. Oz at once becomes human just as Dorothy. He cannot do a wizard's deeds, he can only do human good. Frederick Buechner in his book Telling the Truth says, "He [Oz] cannot give them anything they do not already have, and that is the meaning of the

gifts he then distributes among them."¹⁸

In another sense, the Wizard is a psychotherapist and the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion are his patients. The Wizard, by helping each adjust inwardly to their talent, helps them adjust outwardly to deal with the world as it is. The Wizard cannot present them a new world, or in them a world of joy and transcendence. Why? because he is only a really good man, but a very bad wizard. He is not a magician. Frederick Buechner says, "The only best for them is the best they can do for themselves and for each other."¹⁹ As stated earlier, the case for Dorothy is more difficult--initially. The Wizard fails altogether for Dorothy when his balloon takes off without her. But Glinda, the Good Witch, bears out the responsibility Oz would have. Glinda says to Dorothy that she always had it within herself to return to Kansas. Thus, like her friends, Dorothy has had it in her power to reach her goal of returning to Kansas.²⁰

L. Frank Baum entitled the chapter in The Wizard of Oz in which all this happens, "The Magic Art of the Great Humbug".²¹ The "Great Humbug" is the Wizard of Oz. His "Magic Art" consists of the gifts he gives to the Scarecrow, the Tinman, the Lion and Dorothy. But further, The Wizard of Oz in many ways is the dehumbugging of fairytales. The dehumbugging lesson L. Frank Baum teaches is that good and hard work determines efforts, efforts such as the journey to Oz and the Emerald City, and an occasional helping hand from friends pays off in the end. Through their own adventures Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion learn that faith in themselves will conquer all.²²

As I have pointed out, this theme is evident in both the book and the movie. We see in the book and the movie that the Wizard plays the same role in that he is the one who gives each character the symbol they need to fully

use and understand the gift that we can see they have had all along. However, in a wider view, we see that the book and the movie are widely varied. In fact, we can view the movie as an interpretation of the book. There are major differences between the book and the movie. The most important of these is the fact that the movie portrays Dorothy's journey to Oz as a dream. We can see that the movie's scriptwriters may have been influenced by Freud's theory of dreams as wish fulfillment. Freud's theory was a popularly held theory in the years of the movies' production. There are other less major differences. Indeed, though, all of this lends us to think that the movie can be seen as an interpretation of the book. I have tried to show how the movie is different and perhaps offer insights to the differences. From there I have tried to tie in a rather modern understanding of the Wizard and the Scarecrow, the Tinman, the Lion, and Dorothy. We see that the characters of both the book and the movie are like us in their pursuit of concrete and visible symbols of gifts they may already possess.

NOTES

¹Victor Fleming, dir, The Wizard of Oz, with Judy Garland, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.

²MGM, 1939.

³MGM, 1939.

⁴MGM, 1939.

⁵L. Frank Baum, The Wizard of Oz (USA: The Reilly and Lee Co., 1956), p. 38.

⁶Michael Patrick Hearn, The Annotated Wizard of Oz--The Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1973), p. 270.

⁷Thomas Aquinas, The Disputed Questions vol. II Ques. 10-20 trans. by James V. McGlynn, S.J., (Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 36.

⁸Baum, pp. 52-58.

⁹Baum, p. 58.

¹⁰Baum, p. 68.

¹¹Hearn, p. 152.

¹²Baum, p. 71.

¹³Baum, p. 234.

¹⁴Frederick Buechner, Telling the Truth The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairytale, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 94.

¹⁵Hearn, p. 270.

¹⁶Baum, p. 173.

¹⁷Baum, p. 180.

¹⁸Buechner, p. 94.

¹⁹Buechner, p. 94.

²⁰Buechner, p. 94.

²¹Baum, p. 183.

²²Buechner, p. 95.

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