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Dorothy's Timeless Quest

Abstract

Analyzes Dorothy's initial adventure to Oz and back in terms of Campbell's monomyth. The boon that she receives in Oz, and brings back to Kansas, is a more developed self with the ability—learned in Oz—to love selflessly.

Additional Keywords

Baum, L. Frank—Characters—Dorothy Gale; Baum, L. Frank. Oz books; Campbell, Joseph—Theory of the monomyth; Love in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; Monomyth

Dorothy's Timeless Quest

Richard Tuerk

In the preface to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* L. Frank Baum calls his book "a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out." He tried, he writes, to eliminate from it "the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy . . . , together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by . . . [the] authors" of European fairy stories "to point a fearsome moral to each tale" (2).

As readers recognize, however, Baum is a better creator than critic.¹ In his book, Dorothy and her companions face "monstrous" Kalidahs with "bodies like bears and heads like tigers" (42), a witch "so wicked that the blood in her had dried up many years before" (82), and "a tremendous monster, like a giant spider" (123); so the work is certainly not devoid of "blood curdling incident." Also, even though *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is in many ways "modernized," especially in its reliance on machines, Oz is, as Raylyn Moore points out, "first and last constructed of the stuff of the primitive unconscious, the darkly glittering building materials of all myth and fairy tale" (123).² In addition, part of the strength of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* comes from Baum's use of one of the oldest and most prevalent patterns available to writers — that of the monomyth — which he blends with his intuitive knowledge of ageless aspects of the human psyche.

Baum did not have access to modern studies of the progress of the monomythic hero, such as *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, or to modern studies of the psychological aspects of fairy tales, such as *The Uses of Enchantment* by Bruno Bettelheim. But he did have access to hundreds of myths and fairy tales. Drawing on them in creating his masterpiece, he structured his story the way tales — such as those of Odysseus, Aeneas, Jack who climbs the beanstalk, and Snow White — have been structured for centuries. In fact, it is surprising how closely Baum's work follows the basic pattern.³ To see *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* simply as Dorothy's quest for a way to return to Kansas is to miss many of the sources of the book's strength, for like most monomythic heroes Dorothy achieves far more than simply finding a way to return home.

According to Campbell, the monomyth in its most general terms involves a "hero" who

ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

The main phases of Dorothy's journey clearly fit this pattern, except perhaps for the idea of her having boons to

bestow when she returns, since *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* ends immediately after she gets back to Kansas, and in the book she gives boons only to residents of Oz. But even in Kansas she retains the power to bestow boons.

As Campbell points out, although the hero of myth may save his entire culture, "Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph" (37-38). Dorothy's story is, as Baum notes, basically a fairy tale; still, in Oz she saves two cultures — the Munchkins and the Winkies — by killing witches that enslave them, but in Kansas she gains the ability to achieve only a domestic triumph.

In Campbell's more detailed analysis of the monomyth, "The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure" (245). Dorothy's story begins with her orphaned, living with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in a "common-day hut." In fact, the house in the 1939 movie based on the book is palatial compared with the one in the book, which has only one room with "a rusty looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. Uncle Henry and Aunt Em had a big bed in one corner, and Dorothy a little bed in another corner." The house has "no garret at all, and no cellar — except a small hole, dug in the ground, called a cyclone cellar" (7). The land around it is also bleak:

When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached to the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else. (8)

Their poverty in this wasteland is so great that in a later Oz book, in spite of his hard work, Uncle Henry cannot pay his mortgage and faces the prospect of having to hire Dorothy out to do housework while he and Aunt Em hunt for work, knowing that no one will want to hire people as old as they are (*Emerald City* 23-25).

Dorothy does not voluntarily leave home. She is, to use Campbell's phrase, "carried away . . . to the threshold of adventure," by what Baum calls a "cyclone" (9). At the threshold, Campbell writes, the hero meets "a shadow presence that guards the passage." If the hero defeats "this power," he may "go alive into the kingdom of the dark

(brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm)" (245-46). Dorothy defeats the power: she unknowingly drops her house on the Wicked Witch of the East (13) and is thus able to cross the boundary between the world of reality and fairy land unharmed.

In the typical set of monomythic adventures as Campbell describes them, the hero meets "a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (69). Dorothy meets no such figure before her defeat of one of those forces: the Wicked Witch of the East. But immediately after killing the witch, she meets a "little woman" whose "face was covered with wrinkles, her hair was nearly white, and she walked rather stiffly." This is the Good Witch of the North, who freely admits that she is not as strong as the witch Dorothy has just killed (12).

Still, this little woman has great power. When Dorothy asks the Good Witch of the North to accompany her to the Emerald City, the woman replies: "No, I cannot do that, . . . but I will give you my kiss, and no one will dare injure a person who has been kissed by the Witch of the North." She then kisses Dorothy, and "Where her lips touched the girl they left a round, shining mark" (17). This "amulet," to use Campbell's term, provides Dorothy with protection in her future journeys in Oz, especially during her encounter with the Wicked Witch of the West. When the flying monkeys the witch sends to "destroy" Dorothy see the good witch's kiss, their leader says: "We dare not harm this little girl, . . . for she is protected by the Power of Good, and that is greater than the Power of Evil" (78-79), words which, incidentally, seem to contradict the good witch's assertion that she is not as strong as one of the wicked witches. Nonetheless, instead of destroying Dorothy, the monkeys carry her to the witch's castle. Even the witch herself fears the kiss: "The Wicked Witch was both surprised and worried when she saw the mark on Dorothy's forehead, for she knew well that neither the Winged Monkeys nor she, herself, dare hurt the girl in any way" (79).

Dorothy also has another amulet, the silver shoes that were worn by the Wicked Witch of the East. Although the good witch does not exactly give Dorothy these shoes, she tells the girl that, because she is responsible for the wicked witch's death, the shoes belong to her, and she "shall have them to wear" (15). Later, seeing the shoes, the Wicked Witch of the West trembles "with fear, for she knew what a powerful charm belonged to them" (79).

"Beyond the threshold," Campbell writes, "the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers)" (246). The Oz landscape is indeed unfamiliar to Dorothy. Whereas Kansas is gray, dry, and barren, Oz is colorful and fertile. In Oz Dorothy always can find abundant food and water. Yet readers often notice how intimate some of the unfamiliar forces are that threaten and help Dorothy, so

much so that the makers of the 1939 movie treat her adventures as a dream, thus making her journey entirely internal; and one critic calls Oz Dorothy's "vision of what is possible in Kansas" (Hansen 101). I think, however, that in the book Baum allows readers no such easy escapes. He gives no indication that the story must not be taken literally or that Oz is not an objective place distinctly different from Kansas. Still, Dorothy's journey functions on at least two levels simultaneously, with, for example, the Scarecrow being an objectively real character and at the same time representing Dorothy's ability to think, the Tin Woodman her ability to love, and the Cowardly Lion her bravery. In addition, just as Max Luthi sees the battle with a dragon or other evil force in a folk fairy tale as "not only a symbol for the struggle with the dark side of our unconscious, what is evil or sinister within us" but also "a symbol for the struggle against evil in the world" (80-81), so one can easily see the threatening forces in Oz, such as the witches, as representing parts of Dorothy's psyche at the same time that they are objectively real.

Dorothy's adventures certainly involve the "tests" of which Campbell writes. Invariably, she passes them, sometimes through ratiocination, at times mixed with magic, but more often through blind luck. Her calling the field mice to help her find the way back to the Emerald City after she kills the Wicked Witch of the West (89) is an example of the former; her destruction of the Wicked Witches is an example of the latter. She does not even know of the existence of the Wicked Witch of the East until after she kills her (13), and her throwing water at the Wicked Witch of the West is not calculated to kill but results from a fit of anger when the witch steals one of Dorothy's silver shoes and vows to steal the other (83).

According to Campbell, arriving "at the nadir of the mythological round," the hero "undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward" (246). Dorothy's supreme ordeal occurs when she is sent to "Kill the Wicked Witch of the West" (68), a task she accomplishes only after becoming the witch's prisoner and kitchen slave (81). Her ultimate reward is to return home.

Campbell writes that if the powers remain friendly to the hero, his reward involves such things as "sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis)" (246). Obviously, the rewards Campbell mentions do not apply literally to Dorothy. At one point she seems to achieve a kind of father atonement when the Wizard agrees to take her back to Kansas, but he breaks his promise when his balloon ascends without her aboard (108). As Moore recognizes, he "turns out to be no great, helping father at all" (135).

Dorothy's real reward involves a kind of mother atonement with Glinda the Good followed by a reunion with Aunt Em.⁴ On a psychological level killing the two witches is Dorothy's way of working through the anger a child inevitably directs toward a mother who she feels has deserted her, in Dorothy's case by dying.⁵ Since Dorothy

does not destroy the first witch in a face-to-face encounter and since Dorothy's mother has apparently been dead for a long time (8), thus giving her anger a chance to grow,⁶ the mother atonement that results from this witch's death — namely, the Good Witch of the North's blessing — is too easily achieved to produce the proper catharsis. Thus, Dorothy's subsequent killing of the Wicked Witch of the West, her journey to Glinda's palace, and her loving reception by Glinda involve a kind of additional mother atonement which reconciles Dorothy to her mother's death, a necessary prelude to her return to Kansas and her reunion with Aunt Em.

"The final work," Campbell writes, "is that of return"; if the powers bless the hero, he returns "under their protection" (246). The powers in the form of Glinda the Good Witch of the South bless Dorothy. Glinda explains to her about the silver shoes (Baum's version of seven-league boots) which can magically carry her back to Kansas. Then, Glinda sends the girl on her way (131-32).

According to Campbell, "At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind" (246). In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy returns, she discovers that "the Silver Shoes had fallen off in her flight through the air, and were lost forever in the desert" that separates Oz from the rest of the world (132). Thus, Dorothy successfully completes her journey.

In the final phase of the monomyth, Campbell writes, "The boon that" the hero "brings restores the world (elixir)" (246). As we have seen, however, Dorothy is involved in a fairy tale, so her boon need not restore the entire world.⁷ In fact, it does not restore anything in this particular book, although she eventually (in *The Emerald City of Oz*) is able to take Aunt Em and Uncle Henry to Oz to live out their old age in happiness.

But *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* ends immediately after Dorothy's return, when Dorothy has not yet received the power to return to Oz herself, much less take anyone else with her. As Aunt Em goes "to water the cabbages," Dorothy lands "on the broad Kansas prairie" in front of the new house Uncle Henry has built to replace the one destroyed by the tornado (132). As Aunt Em's activity indicates, Dorothy no longer is in a land of abundance and fertility; she has returned to a place of poverty, drought, and unremitting, often unproductive labor. Aunt Em embraces the little girl and asks, "where in the world did you come from?" But Dorothy has not been in the world, at least as her aunt understands the term. So she replies, "From the Land of Oz. . . . And here is Toto, too. And oh, Aunt Em! I'm so glad to be home again!" (132). Where then is the boon that Dorothy can bestow on others? Is it simply her presence? If so, the book is true to the ancient pattern in all ways except this one.

Actually, Dorothy gains something that can provide an exceptional boon. As one would expect after seeing how closely the structure of Baum's book follows the monomyth, Dorothy's voyage is in part one of self-dis-

covery and growth. Moreover, if the story is viewed on a psychological level, Dorothy's growth should not be surprising, for, as Luthi points out, "nightmares involving evil spirits that come to carry off the dreamer often occur during important transitions" (113); although her adventures are not a dream, for Dorothy the tornado is the equivalent of the dream evil spirits. In addition, if, as I theorize above, Dorothy's adventures in Oz involve working through her anger at feeling that her mother has deserted her, she should be more mature when she returns to Kansas.

One critic writes: "Selflessness and loving kindness constitute the very air of Oz" (Bewley 206). Although, as the existence of wicked witches indicates, this critic exaggerates, selfless love is one of the main attributes of the good characters in Oz. In eliminating the wicked witches, Dorothy allows the "selflessness and loving kindness" even greater sway over the magical country and its inhabitants. Baum, then, in a very real sense, resembles the creators of folk fairy tales who, Julius E. Heuschner says,

penetrate behind the superficial appearance of things and discover a beautiful, significant, harmonious world. This harmony is frequently expressed even in the structure of the fairy tale, based usually on the number three. This number has always and everywhere been expressing spiritual entities. . . . (16)

Threes abound in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, ranging from the three members of Dorothy's family to her three most significant helpers in Oz. Her adventures in Oz are themselves structured around three separate quests, first for the Wizard, then for the death of the Wicked Witch of the West, and finally for the palace of Glinda. Thus, it is fitting that Dorothy's quest be for something more than a mere physical place called home.

And in the course of her adventures Dorothy finds something more: she finds within herself the ability to participate in the selfless love that characterizes most of the inhabitants of Oz. Once she finds this ability, she is ready to cross the threshold back to Kansas so that she can bring joy and love into the gray world of Aunt Em and Uncle Henry.

In Oz Dorothy receives numerous lessons in selfless love, especially from those most selfless of creatures, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. According to Campbell, the monomythic hero must learn to have no regard for what the Hindu monk Shankaracharya calls "this corpse-like body" (123). Both of Dorothy's principal teachers have no regard for their "corpse-like bodies"; in fact, neither has a "corpse-like body," although at one time the Tin Woodman did. Thus, it is fitting that he, rather than the Scarecrow, be Dorothy's foremost example of love, even though her actual achievement more closely approaches that of the Scarecrow.

In fact, a kind of love led to the Woodman's abandonment of the body. He loved and wanted to marry a Munchkin girl who worked for an old woman opposed to the marriage. So the old woman went to the Wicked Witch

of the East, who enchanted the Woodman's axe so that it chopped off pieces of his body, which he had replaced with tin. Finally, he became all tin, but he says, "alas! I had now no heart, so that I lost all my love for the Munchkin girl, and did not care whether I married her or not" (33-34). The Woodman thinks that without a heart he is incapable of love and compassion, but his actions repeatedly show that he is mistaken. Instead, what he has lost is the ability to lust, that is, to engage in love involving the appetites of the flesh. His love becomes entirely selfless and is directed toward all creatures, as the following episode demonstrates:

Once, indeed, the Tin Woodman stepped upon a beetle that was crawling along the road, and killed the poor little thing. This made the Tin Woodman very unhappy, for he was always careful not to hurt any living creature; and as he walked along he wept several tears of sorrow and regret. (39)

He begins to rust, so that he must be oiled. Consequently, he says: "This will serve me a lesson ... to look where I step. For if I should kill another bug or beetle I should surely cry again, and crying rusts my jaw so that I cannot speak" (39-40).

Thus, his love is so selfless that he inflicts self-damage when he harms another creature. As the narrator comments, "The Tin Woodman knew very well he had no heart, and therefore he took great care never to be cruel or unkind to anything." As the Woodman himself says, "You people with hearts ... have something to guide you, and need never do wrong; but I have no heart, and so I must be very careful" (40). Having achieved a stage of love that few mortal saints achieve, he becomes for Dorothy an example of a selflessness that she, of course, cannot attain. But what she does attain is great indeed.

As noted earlier, her achievement is closer to that of the Scarecrow. As one critic observes, "The important result of the Scarecrow's adventures with Dorothy was not that he got brains from the Wizard" but "that he developed his affections" (Sackett 219). The Scarecrow's ability from the first to solve problems shows that he has brains all along; his great concern toward the end of the book for Dorothy's happiness shows that he too can feel selfless affection. In fact, after the Wizard departs, the Scarecrow declares that only Dorothy's inability to "be contented to live in the Emerald City" keeps the friends from happiness and that he is so grateful to her for bringing him his "good luck" that he will "never leave her until she starts back to Kansas for good and all," even though staying with her involves leaving the Emerald City over which he now rules (111-13). Dorothy meets the Scarecrow before she encounters any of her other friends (21); she takes leave of him last (131-32). Thus, he has the most time to influence her, so it is not surprising that she attains a degree of selflessness similar to his.

When *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* begins, Dorothy is a selfish little child, laughing and playing happily with Toto "all day long" and showing no concern for her aunt who "never smiled, now" and uncle who "did not know what

joy was" (8). When she first gets to Oz, her only concern is to return home. She tells the Good Witch of the North, "I am anxious to get back to my Aunt and Uncle, for I am sure they will worry about me" (16). Thus, she shows some concern for others, but her lack of specificity implies that her real concern is for herself, as does her reaction when the Good Witch of the North tells her, "you will have to live with us": she cries not for her aunt and uncle's sake but because "she felt so lonely among all these strange people" (16).

Shortly after Dorothy finds and oils the Tin Man, he and the Scarecrow begin to discuss which is more important, a heart or brains. As Dorothy listens to this debate concerning what one critic says is "perhaps the central philosophical problem in the Land of Oz" (Sackett 218), she

did not say anything, for she was puzzled to know which of her two friends was right, and she decided if she could only get back to Kansas and Aunt Em it did not matter so much whether the Woodman had no brains and the Scarecrow no heart, or each got what he wanted. (35)

Here, Dorothy shows concern neither about this typical nineteenth-century-American head-heart debate nor, more significantly, about her friends' desires. In fact, she is so unconcerned about the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman that she confuses what each seeks. Thus, her attitude mirrors the self-centeredness she displays earlier in Kansas.

As she travels through Oz, however, she becomes more concerned for her friends. When the field mice help pull the Cowardly Lion from the field of poppies, Dorothy "was glad he had been rescued" because "She had grown so fond of the big Lion" (56). And after defeating the Wicked Witch of the West, she is very concerned about rescuing the Tin Woodman and Scarecrow (84), the former of whom has been dropped on rocks and the latter of whom has been unstuffed and left in a tree (78).

After the Wizard proves unable to help Dorothy, she travels to the castle of Glinda the Good. She tells Glinda that she wants to return to Kansas because "Aunt Em will surely think something dreadful has happened to me, and that will make her put on mourning; and unless the crops are better this year than they were last I am sure Uncle Henry cannot afford it" (128). Her specificity here indicates that she has been thinking seriously about the needs of others. The Scarecrow then reminds her that without her help, he would still be without a brain and standing in a field. The Tin Woodman tells her that without her he would still be heartless and rusting in the forest. And the Cowardly Lion tells her that he would still be a coward. Dorothy responds: "This is all true ... and I am glad I was of use to these good friends. But now that each of them has had what he most desired, ... I think I should like to go back to Kansas" (131). The sequence of events in this speech is important: Dorothy puts her friends' happiness ahead of her own. Here, Baum indicates that she has grown considerably. As we would expect, she cannot

wholly dispense with concern for self; she is no Tin Woodman. But like the Scarecrow she unhesitatingly puts others before self.

Dorothy is thus a true monomythic hero who achieves what Campbell calls "a domestic, microcosmic triumph," at least as far as the real world of Kansas is concerned, taking with her from Oz the potential for bringing joy into the world of two joyless people. Having worked through her own feelings of anger, she can truly be "glad to be home again." Her return then is fraught with the most important kinds of consequences for Aunt Em, Uncle Henry, and Dorothy herself, for even though she cannot bring the silver shoes with her, her adventures in Oz enable her to grow so that she can bring to Kansas a much more powerful source of magic, one of the most powerful sources in or out of fairy land — the ability to love selflessly.

Thus, Baum uses the timeless stuff of myth, fairy tale, and human psychology to structure *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. His "modernized fairy tale" has within it elements as old as the oldest oral literature with which scholars are familiar. By skillfully using these elements to structure his book and to provide some of its content, Baum makes Dorothy's quest universal and timeless and makes *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* an object of enduring interest. ☞

Notes

- ¹ See for example Brotman 163-64.
- ² For statements about and brief studies of the mythic and fairy tale background of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* see Nye 4, Schuman, and Attebery 91-93. Also, for a spoof of the idea of treating Baum's book seriously in terms of myth see Starr.
- ³ Moore recognizes that Baum "very successfully" uses "the archetypal journey of the hero" "in individual works," including *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (134-36).
- ⁴ Moore calls Glinda a "supportive mother-figure" and Ozma (who is not in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*) the main "mother-goddess figure" in Oz (126-27). Beckwith, however, asserts that Glinda "must not be taken as a mother-symbol" since she is not an "ugly old" woman (241).
- ⁵ Compare Bettelheim 66-70.
- ⁶ Compare Bettelheim 29.
- ⁷ Schuman exaggerates when he writes that through Dorothy's "return, Kansas is changed. The land seems less hostile, the family is reconciled. The greenness of Oz has renewed the fertility of the 'normal world' (303). He presents no evidence to support these assertions.

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Skilled Needlecraft Needed

The Society's banner, which has served since 1972, needs replacing. With the Tolkien Centenary soon upon us, we would like to have a beautiful new banner ready for the event. If you sew and embroider well, and would like to help the Society in this special way, please contact the Society's Founder, Glen GoodKnight. Address is on page 2.

MYTHOPOEIC CORE READING LIST

MYTHLORE frequently publishes articles that presuppose the reader is already familiar with the works they discuss. This is natural, given the purpose of this journal. In order to be a general help, the following is what might be considered a core reading list, containing the most well known and frequently discussed works. Due to the many editions printed, only the title and original date of publication are given.

J.R.R. Tolkien

The Hobbit, 1937; "Leaf by Niggle," 1945; "On Fairy-Stories," 1945; *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* 1954; *The Two Towers* 1954; *The Return of the King* 1955; *Smith of Wootton Major* 1967; *The Silmarillion* 1977

C.S. Lewis

Out of the Silent Planet 1938; *Perelandra* 1943; *That Hideous Strength* 1945; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* 1950; *Prince Caspian* 1951; *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* 1952; *The Silver Chair* 1953; *The Horse and His Boy* 1954; *The Magician's Nephew* 1955; *The Last Battle* 1956; *Till We Have Faces* 1956.

Charles Williams

War in Heaven 1930; *Many Dimensions* 1931; *The Place of the Lion* 1931; *The Greater Trumps* 1932; *Shadows of Ecstasy* 1933; *Descent Into Hell* 1937; *All Hallow's Eve* 1945; *Taliessin through Logres* 1938, and *The Region of the Summer Stars* 1944 (the last two printed together in 1954).