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### Baum's Dorothy and the Power of Identity

Discussions of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* have highlighted the relationship between Dorothy as an individual and Oz as a whole. When this relationship is put into the context of change in American identity, one can see how Dorothy's identity connects to the new-found identity of the middle-class American. Just before Baum wrote *The Wizard*, American identity had gone through a large shift. Because of a greater wage for the rising middle class, individuals found themselves playing a key role in their communities. Of course, there was a tension between the old American identity and the new American identity; and, dealing with this tension became the duty of authors ("American" 27.) Even as this change in identity was present, critics chose to focus on the political impact of Dorothy as a character in *The Wizard*. Most critics see Dorothy as the beginning of political change. An example of this is the work of J. Jackson Barlow, who argues that not only did Dorothy commence Oz's change from an uncivilized land to a civilized land, but that this change was democratic (8). David Emerson agrees that Dorothy's influence was felt in Oz, but he thinks that Dorothy's role is to be the "motivating will (fire)" behind her and her companions achieving their goal (5). Littlefield adds to the conversation of Barlow and Emerson by inserting that even though Dorothy was the one to produce change, Dorothy gets involved in the politics of Oz, only to leave Oz to go "home" to Kansas. These different opinions on the effect Dorothy has as an individual all bring different aspects to light about what her contribution was to Oz. Though some think her influence direct, others think she is the moving force beneath others' actions. The issue is whether Dorothy's contribution to Oz as an individual was solely political, or if there is something underlying the political sphere that an innocent young girl alone could penetrate, resulting in an everlasting

influence on Baum's wonderland.

My opinion is that although Dorothy's contribution influences the political powers in Oz, the results of her actions extends beyond being a catalyst for political change. Instead, Dorothy is able to influence, on a personal level, those around her. She diligently tries to lead others to comfort. Even in times where she does not directly choose certain consequences, she is able to take action in a way that brings her to the realization of a bigger goal. Her individuality, as Emerson said, "represents a fulfillment and integration of the whole self" (5). This means that Dorothy's social responsibility is to tap into her whole potential and realize what makes her an individual so she can use those unique capabilities to aid society. Through Baum's inclusion of Dorothy in *The Wizard*, he is able to relate to his audience that an individual who knows her place is willing to discover her potential as a catalyst for change and as a leader so she can contribute to a cause bigger than herself.

While government controlling Oz before the arrival of Dorothy holds the land in a freeze, Dorothy is provided the environment she needs to discover and fulfill her purposes as a catalyst and a leader. The witches of Oz anchor the cardinal points of Oz, which is held in the center by the Wizard himself. These powers are monarchical, ruling small groups of Ozians without their real consent. An example of this is the Wicked Witch of the West's ruling of the Winkies. She made them more than her subjects, but her slaves who had to "do as they were told" (121). The function of the monarchical rule is to provide an example of change. Andrew Karp suggests that Baum knew what he was doing when he made the governments monarchical. He argues that Baum saw "the potential... for conflict and exploitation...in a democracy..." and that fulfilling this potential would highlight the tension between an individual's freedom and their self-interest (111). This tension will be felt by Dorothy who, as we will see, "stands up to political

opinion and challenges figures of authority” (Barlow 10). This tension not only will help shape the identity of Dorothy, but it also molds inhabitants of Oz into their stiffness. In short, Baum creates a monarchical government to provide Dorothy with an environment where she can discover her role she can play in Oz.

Dorothy’s arrival in Oz immediately disturbs the power structure in Oz, putting her in a position to be a catalyst for change and find her purpose. When Dorothy’s house falls on the Wicked Witch of the East, she pulls the other powers from their prior place. One of the four corners is missing. After being given the order to kill the Wicked Witch of the West in order for Oz to get her home, Dorothy interacts with the Witch herself. After being a slave to the Witch, Dorothy accidentally melts her after the Witch takes one of her silver slippers. This displaces one more peg that the old ways of Oz were hung on. As Dorothy ends her journey, she must confront the ever-wise Wizard of Oz, who takes on different forms each time he meets someone to keep up the illusion of his power. He is discovered to be a humbug, and when trying to get Dorothy back to Kansas, he is swept away in the balloon that is supposed to take them there. With three of the five powers gone, Oz is able to proceed to the next phase of the history of Oz: Civilization. Dorothy is able to “set the inhabitants on a path to government by consent” (Barlow 10). By getting involved in Oz, Dorothy is positioned to enable change. The result, though still maintaining the five powers, gives certain inhabitants a ruler with better intentions than the last. Littlefield, allegorically ties the rulings of the Scarecrow over Emerald city as being beneficial to the farmer’s importance. At the same time, he connects that the Tin Woodman ruling in the west signifies westward movement of industrialism (Littlefield 58). Though Littlefield reads *The Wizard* allegorically, I will add that if the effects of the power are symbolically good, that the effects as the text is written are good. The Tin Man is liked by the Winkies, and so he decided to

become their leader. The Scarecrow reigns over the Emerald City because Oz puts him in charge and nobody else forces him to step down. The Scarecrow replaces a “humbug” leader, and now Ozian leadership has a greater chance of benefiting the people. Dorothy’s desire and willingness to get home shapes her actions, though not always a direct choice, allows her as an individual to change the shape of Oz.

Dorothy’s role as a political figure is prominent throughout *The Wizard*; however, her role shifts as she plays a much more personal part in the lives of those she meets in Oz. Her placement in Oz allows her to act politically in Oz by interacting with the then current powers and uprooting the malevolent powers. This allows “civilization” to enter a country that the Witch of the North herself said had “never been civilized” (25). Her personal influence on those she is around is what makes Dorothy an example of the potential power of an individual. She is able to act as a catalyst as she introduces opportunities to those around her so they in turn could have their own effect on their environment.

As Dorothy helps individuals who later accompany her on her journey, her role as an enabler shifts to a role of a more prominent leader. She first enables Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman physically. The creators of the Scarecrow leave him hanging on a pole in the middle of the field to perform the tedious task of remaining on that pole to scare away the birds. Then, he asks Dorothy to “take away the pole” so he can get down. He then exclaims that he feels “like a new man” (36-37). Even Baum suggests that Dorothy is going to enable the Scarecrow’s future actions by naming this chapter “How Dorothy Saved the Scarecrow”. Dorothy made it possible for the Scarecrow to move so he could discover his true potential and not be stuck performing a limiting task. Not only does she physically help Scarecrow, but she also helps the rusted Tin Woodman move, allowing him to find his true purpose. The Tin Woodman had rusted in the

same position after the Wicked Witch of the East caused it to rain. When he rusted, he couldn't reach his oil can for himself, and so remained dependent on the help of someone that would come along. Dorothy, as she is passing by, takes action, and with the Scarecrow, they are able to get him mobile again. In the case of the Tin Woodman, he would have "stood there always" if it weren't for the actions of Scarecrow and Dorothy (51). The Scarecrow and Dorothy, as Baum's chapter title says, "rescue" the Woodman. Besides helping others overcome physical obstacles, her actions bring Cowardly Lion the opportunity to break through an obstacle of fear. The last case of how Dorothy affects her companions is how she influences the Lion. The Lion had always felt himself a coward, but after his journey with Dorothy, he says, "This forest is perfectly delightful... Never before have I seen such a wonderful place" (195). Before his journey with Dorothy, Cowardly Lion was scared in his own habitat; however, after his journey, he is able to find a forest pleasant to be in. It is at the end of her journey that Dorothy acknowledges that she has played her role sufficiently. After Glinda tells Dorothy that she could have left Oz the moment she got there, her friends exclaim that if she had left, they would have remained the way they once were without progressing. Dorothy says, "I am glad I was of use to these good friends. But now that each of them has what he most desired,... I think I should like to go back to Kansas" (210). Dorothy is able to bring all of her companions together around her so they can fulfil their journey together. Because she was a leader, Dorothy and her companions were able to achieve their potential.

By helping each of her companions find their potential, she was able to create an equality in her own small community. By encouraging the individual to progress from their past position, she is able to equalize each of their mobility. As each character's mobility increases, the small community of Dorothy and her companions can progress on their journey. Emerson

observes this fulfilling of the whole and concludes that, “the egalitarian bond between the friends emphasizes Dorothy’s valuing of the community and co-operation over leadership and self-determination” (5). In other words, Dorothy treating her companions as her equal shows that she values the societal whole. Each of them have their own perceived weaknesses, and each of them are able to later see that those weaknesses are strengths. Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and Cowardly Lion are able to go beyond their own worlds and realize their potential. Because Dorothy’s role as a leader is seen in her desire to not leave anyone behind, her companions have equal opportunities to fulfill their potential.

Even though she has allowed for a lot of change in Oz, the most important part of Dorothy’s time in Oz is in her finding her own potential to be a leader. Her actions over time in Oz allowed her to appreciate the possible greatness of an individual, which made it possible for her to aid those she comes in contact with. When she arrives at Oz, her main goal is to get home. She walks through a land unknown to her, and plays a role in many lives as the changer of their environment. In Kansas, she is the only thing that suggests color in a world of gray; but as she lives in Oz, her color is on display quite differently. Linda Rohrer Paige argues that Dorothy’s “true search is for the power within herself” (149). She has to find her place in Oz, especially as a young girl in the midst of influential male figures and able female leaders, and adapt to affect it. As she found herself through her experiences in helping others, she was able to lead others to their most positive paths. Her self-realization came as she became an active participant in the space she was in. By acting, she naturally became a leader and, after all of the change that she brings to Oz, it is herself that is re-molded into an active young girl with an experience that she will always remember and always be able to use. Even though she might have left after changing Oz, as Littlefield pointed out, her leadership left its mark on Oz. Through her actions, Dorothy

realizes her potential as an individual and is then able to influence Oz as a societal whole.

By Dorothy leading individuals to realize their potential, they are able to become leaders themselves; and in this way, her leadership allows her footprints to remain in Oz after she goes home to Kansas. Throughout their journey, the roles of her companions grow to be more influential, increasing their potential to leave footprints of their own. Scarecrow is able to become the leader of Emerald City because of the change that increased his mobility. He embodies the value of intelligence, but without Dorothy, would have been left needing the social validation he needed to overcome, what Gretchen Ritter calls, his “lack” to be an effective leader in Oz (Ritter 180). The Tin Woodman’s role in Oz later becomes the ruler of the Winkies who he had a “fondness” for, though he didn’t know he had a heart (208). The Cowardly Lion becomes the king of the forest after showing courage and defeating the spider that was the ruler of the forest before. One person made all of this change personal and possible: Dorothy. Without her acting in order to change the lives of her friends, Oz would have remained the same, and the fullest purpose of her friends would be left unfulfilled. Even if Oz changed after Dorothy left, it surely would never be the same “uncivilized” country that it once was. Dorothy’s individual influence changed the path of a whole nation. This essential role that Dorothy plays asks Americans, as Ritter suggests, to “show faith in themselves and their abilities, just as Dorothy finds that the ability to change her situation lies in her” (184). In a world where Americans were finding that they have power, the idea that a small girl can create a strong identity once she finds her purpose in her environment would be relatable to many. *The Wizard* is evidence that their work as an individual has an impact on others every day. This is a huge hope for a growing class whose central focus was work (“American” 27). It is a strong message that just by trying and pushing forward, Americans can fulfill their potential of being a leader and an enabler of change.

Dorothy's role characterizes the moral shift in American ideology that founded the idea that the American individual can impact the whole. Throughout *The Wizard*, Dorothy continues to show what Helene de Burgh-Woodman calls the "Self and Other" relationship (290). Though de Burgh-Woodman uses the idea that one has an awareness of the community around them as an exploration on globalism over time, the thought that this attitude was current and living throughout American growth explains Dorothy's actions. In Baum's fairy tale, Dorothy, a small girl from Kansas, becomes the individual who can compare her needs to the greater whole, which in her case is Oz. Though her desire to find the power to return home propelled her actions in the beginning, she was always careful to take others into consideration. Her sense that there was a need and a space beyond her own makes Dorothy a unique individual. The other characters cannot seem to extend themselves the way Dorothy can. For example, the Witch of the North was not aware of a place called Kansas; and the China Country could only move within their own space and explore their own needs because they were so fragile. Dorothy crossed these limits in a way that was uniquely American. Alan Trachtenberg recalls that *The Wizard* was a story of self-emerging through experience, and that this idea came from the change in American ideals (250). Suddenly, the individual was able to explore who they were, and what their potential could be. Because Americans were finding ways to discover their potential, strong leaders were taking charge and making sure their desires are met, but not without an acknowledgement of those in the space around them. This is what Dorothy is doing. Not only is she an American character, but she is taking on this ideal trait of an American. This reflects Baum's belief in the American idea that the individual is responsible for acting to earn their desires, and then turn around and help others.

Baum has provided readers with an example of someone that, even on her own journey,

is aware enough to interact with everyone. Dorothy as an individual is propelling the story from underneath. Dorothy's journey helps her realize her own self, and even in the process of that discovery, she is able to affect the world that she lands in. She doesn't have to be complete for herself to feel the way that she did for others; in fact, her incompleteness adds to the contribution that she made. It is Dorothy's desire to go back home that suggests she is missing something. The desire to return to Kansas shapes her decisions and her actions during her journey to Oz. In fact, as Funchion inserts throughout his essay "When Dorothy Became History", Baum uses this desire of Dorothy as the propelling force beneath the story. The desire is the driving force of the narrative because it is through taking the path towards our desire that one can discover their true self. Through uprooting her desires throughout the text, she becomes a powerful individual who can take on bringing change to Oz. Her desires shape her actions in Oz, thus forming her role. She helps different groups of Ozians find freedom through her desire to get back home. She helps others find their own whole by her desire to not leave anyone in trouble. Through all of these actions, she found her individuality and was able to play the role of a leader in Oz itself. She was able to see what was wrong and fix it, even if this fixing was not her own plan, but the consequences of others' actions. By writing and creating a character that can carry herself in a world that is not her own, and have an impact in that world, Baum suggests that there is an inner power that can be found and acted on in every individual. The whole outside ourselves seems to be in need, and it takes individuals who know who they are to expand and act beyond themselves.

By creating a world so dependent on the actions of the individual, Baum is also suggesting that his readers can be the impacting individual. What is interesting is that Baum creates a chain of effects that are woven with the interactions and the relationships between

individuals. By observing these chains we can see that it isn't necessary for an individual to stand alone, but instead each person must play their role. From discovering the roles that one is destined to play, he can act on that role in combination with the discovered roles of others. The roles of the individual affecting the world around that individual seem so key to Baum's story. In fact, Karp noticed that in *The Lost Princess of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion says this about being an individual:

“To be individual, to be different from others, is the only way to become distinguished from the common herd. Let us be glad, therefore, that we differ from one another in form, and in disposition. Variety is the spice of life and we are various enough to enjoy one another's society....” (qtd. in Karp 106 ).

Though not part of Dorothy's own story, the reader can see that the theme of individuality is carried on throughout the texts of Baum. Here, Baum praises our differences as strengths. To Baum, individuality comes together to make one whole that we are all a part of. Though men struggle against themselves as a whole so often, if individuals came together to act in benevolent ways, they could cast out our own witches and artificial government powers. Men can increase the amount of change they can do for good. The individual will have the power to make and keep those changes that he has made in check.

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