

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**The dichotomy of Fantasy and the material world in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz***

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**Abstract:**

The fantastic world and its inherent connection to the real world have been a matter of study for quite some time. Even if many critics denounce the fantastical literature as escapist, other dimensions need to be highlighted. The dichotomy of both the worlds and how it comes together manifesting in Emerald City and Kansas City is worth reading. This paper focuses on the intricacies of both worlds and highlights the significance of their dynamics.

**Keywords:** dichotomy, fantasy, fanatic literature, intricacies etc

L Frank Baum's self-defined "modernized fairy tale" encompasses the dichotomy of both the fantastical and the material world. Fantasy as a mode of expression might be absurd but is independent in itself; in Baum's narrative, it even delves into the real world to make it a whole, "In turn, this "impossible" universe somehow converges creatively on readers' understanding of the real world" (Fredericks 37). Baum's narrative has decisively refuted the claimant of the critics who charge fantastic writing with escapist tendency. The world of Oz takes us much more profound, with the protagonist Dorothy and Oz himself transgressing the boundaries using magic and science, preserving the sanctity of both the macrocosmic spaces. The fantastical world has complimented the real world by reflecting the absence of values beyond the economic science of cognizance, among other things, the latter.

The significance of both worlds circumscribes Baum's narrative, which is evident by the contrasts drawn between the monochromatic world of Kansas and the fantastical Land of Oz. "Dorothy seems to view herself as dispossessed royalty: she observes that while she is a princess in Oz, 'when I'm back in Kansas, I'm only a country girl'" (Griswold 469). Among all the points of difference between the lands, it is interesting to note that the magical land of Oz is a shared

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space; all the characters in the journey, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion, along with Dorothy, are looking at a shared future if not a shared past. While on the other hand, in the land of Kansas, there exists a divided space for Dorothy's uncle, aunt, and herself, which is not meant for companionship but rather exists as a mere rendezvous of daily experiences where homestead does not necessarily imply a shared lifestyle.

Baum reassures the readers throughout the narrative that his inclination is towards the known and the familiar, Dorothy's life back in Kansas. The perilous adventure she undertakes to return home asserts that Fantasy cannot be a substitute for reality. It is not an alternative or an escape from the reality of crude existence. Baum has announced these using metaphors like the silver shoes, which Dorothy could not hold on to after reaching the nonmagical real world, and the scientifically configured escape of Oz from the Emerald City. In the absurd world of grotesque and delight coexisting together, no matter what, things are reconciled in the end, which stands in contradiction to the land of grey Prairies, Dorothy's home, "In Oz, there is a delightful contrast between orderly landscape and disorderly adventures: however weird and threatening are the things that happen to Dorothy and her friends, it is clear that, in such a well laid out world, everything will come out all right" (O'Keefe 20).

In the genre of fantasy fiction, *The Wizard of Oz* also stands out because of the characters' deferral. They are not masters of sorcery or overbearing gifted superheroes. Instead are invested with a void in them. The disability, surprisingly, is enabling in the case of the Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion as they perform some incredible acts of rescue in the journey. The free space of the magical world gives a sense of autonomy to the characters, which is lacking in the real world.

Nevertheless, Toto acts as a constant reminder of the tangibility of this crafted world of liberation. He stays immune to the obscurities of the dangers in the perils of the journey home, almost hinting to the readers that perhaps the stratagem should be to safeguard oneself against the monochromatic perishable world of Kansas, which is the inescapable final destination. Dorothy holding on to Toto might also mean confirming this belief of stark preparedness for the reality that she cannot avoid; hence, it is better to face it with courage and determination, "Dorothy returns home to a Kansas transformed by her new perceptions" (Gilead 280).

The overall grey mood of the fantastical Land of Oz called for an adventure to shake the core of Dorothy, on the face of which she stood firm. The companionship as part of the dangerous adventure highlights the gay part of the novel. To interpret the difference in nuances of the moralistic venture of the fairy tales is essential. The inevitable return to the fantasy land

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and the structural equity in fairy tales is uncanny. However, there stands a unique representation of it in different accounts. As Sarah Gilead, in her essay on Closure of Children's Fantasy Fiction, says, "it may legitimize the fantasy narrative as a necessary lapse from structured reality, a lapse that paradoxically supports reality. But often such a reading noticeably simplifies the Fantasy's rich and multiple meanings (the misprision tending to give itself away by a patronizing or sentimental tone)" (278). Dorothy's return to Kansas City also means a return to a world filled with obstacles and yet the land of known and familiar, which she would choose over the riches and glories of the fantastical world.

The capitalist boom of industrial America foreshadows the journey of Dorothy and her companions using the Yellow Brick road, the marker of prosperity in the text. However, Baum's faith in the industrial venture is doubtful because of the relentless pursuit not bearing any result for them even after following the road to fulfilling their aspiration. She achieved her goal of going back to Kansas through hard work and persistent determination. Her uncle Henry and Aunt Em reflect the working-class population who suffered as a result of this industrial rise. The binary of both worlds shows the reality of exposition to the mechanized way of living in the material world and the struggle to move out of it into the fantastical. Uncle Henry's way of living is a blatant statement of the astute reality of those times, "Uncle Henry never laughed. He worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also, from his long beard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn and rarely spoke" (Baum 25). Thinking of Fantasy to be a naïve escape and nothing good could come out of it is a frivolous accusation. If there were no connection between the fantastical virtual world and the real world, then the resulting body of work would make no sense. It is crucial to encumber that the land of Fantasy shows another dimension of the natural world that could be. Thomas More's Land of Utopia introduced us to a country of perfection unified under the currency of hard work, discipline, and happiness. Claiming the land of Fantasy to be an escapist surge is not fair. More's Utopia showed an alternate way of living that is possible beyond the means of the regularly imagined real world. Jill Paton Walsh wrote on similar lines stating, "[a] work of Fantasy compels a reader into a metaphorical state of mind. On the other hand, a work of realism permits very literal-minded readings ... Even worse; it is possible to read a real book as though it were not fiction." (Hunt 8).

Hence, it could be concluded that Fantasy and the material world converge in the text to portray a kind of departure from the earlier fairy tale writings with the exclusion of morality at its expense. Baum has justified this merger with viable suppositions. He has ensured that the overpowering, perfect fantastical world does not diminish the material world. And both have a

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place of their own and only enhance the importance of the other. Like a binary opposition, the different world makes more sense in the light of the other world and stands in the absence.

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