

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Spirit of Self-Reliance in L Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz***D Punitham¹, *Dr. C Santhosh Kumar²**¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.²Associate Professor, English Wing, DDE, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.

Received- 17 September 2016, Revised- 1 November 2016, Accepted- 12 December 2016, Published- 23 December 2016

ABSTRACT

The *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* represents the spirit of the progressive movement. His heroine is a brave little girl, looking for herself, in spite of Dorothy's emptiness of Kansas prairie. Her adventure helps to achieve and fulfill herself, and her longings symbolically abandons her old self in order to find a new complete one in Oz. Baum's modern heroine portrays the spirit of self-reliance. Dorothy's self-reliance portrays the emptiness of Kansas prairie. Her adventure helps her to achieve the entire self she wishes as she symbolically abandons her old self in order to find a new complete one in Oz.

Keywords: Self-reliance, Journey, Settings, Modern heroine, Quest for self.

Baum has created his heroine at a time noted for women's rapid growth and extensive reform. Women, particularly "felt the jolts of rapid change" asserts Schneider (4), and the presence of such a movement made satisfactory of Baum's modernized fairy tale with the brave little girl, Dorothy, looking for herself. Women at the time, in spite of the child labour laws, women's suffrage, pure food and drug laws or self-improvement, "believed in the possibility of change The uneven, but sustained upward movement of the human race" (Schneider 11-12). Likewise, Dorothy's journey to see the Wizard is one of progression and self-improvement. In spite of Dorothy's bleak conditions at the beginning of the story, she does represent the spirit of the progressive movement.

The traditional literary heroine, "is weak, demure, passive and in need of rescuing" (Rudman302), however Baum's heroine defies these characteristics, for, without taking protection in the cellar, Dorothy withstands a cyclone "mighty enough to crush any building in its path" (WW 9), and without a moment's wavering embarks on a journey to meet a great wizard in the Emerald City. When the Good Witch informs Dorothy about the Wizard's power to help her, Dorothy at once

asks, "How can I get there?" (WW 23), without a thought of what the journey might entail. On her way to see the Wizard, she confronts difficult situations without ever wanting to turn back, for she "commands a presence just by responding to and accepting each detail with the same equipoise and easy curiosity with which she faced the last" (Roger Sale231). She needs rescuing, yet no prince-rescuer will come to save her because, even though she does not learn this until the end of her quest, she previously has the power to rescue herself. "The very freshness of the writing lies in Dorothy's never thinking about how she got where she is, or how she is going to get away, or how she might have done differently or how she could have avoided danger" asserts (Roger Sale 232). Dorothy realizes that she needs to return home and tells the Witch of the North, "I am anxious to get back to my aunt and uncle, for I am sure they will worry about me. Can you help me find my way?" (WW 21). And when the Good Witch says that she can't help her, Dorothy follows the yellow brick road with the expectation that the Wizard may help her. But when the Wizard lets her down, Dorothy finds Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, who advises her: "Your Silver Shoes will carry you over the desert. . . . If you had known their power you could have

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +918903032022

Email address: santhoshc200811@gmail.com (C.S.Kumar)

Double blind peer review under responsibility of DJ Publications

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18831/djeng.org/2016021008>2456-2327© 2016 DJ Publications by Dedicated Juncture Researcher's Association. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

gone back to your Aunt Em the very first day you came to this country” (WW 199). Obviously, Dorothy’s journey and the events along the way make it possible for her to understand this, and in addition to it the Scarecrow gets his brains, the Tin Woodman gets his heart, and the Cowardly Lion to get courage.

The Wizard of the Land of Oz may have fit the role of rescuer, yet he ends out to be a humbug who knows nothing about magic. Unexpectedly and expressively, the male figures in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are feeble to help Dorothy, and “virtually every male in Oz or Kansas is presented as weak and damaged in some fashion, while the women, for good or ill, are for more capable” (Greenberg 22). Dorothy rescues other characters, for she has the ability to help them conquer their insufficiencies. Since Dorothy rescues the Scarecrow from “being perched up on a pole night and day to scare away crows” (WW 31), he feels like a new man. Dorothy also saves Tin Woodman by oiling his joints, and before Dorothy went along, no one had ever heard his groans. At last, Dorothy rescues the Cowardly Lion from an intolerable life without courage when she invites him along to look for the Wizard.

Dorothy also takes the responsibilities of caring her for herself when she finds herself alone for the first time: “Dorothy did not feel nearly so bad as you might think a little girl would who had been suddenly whisked away from her own country and set down in the midst of a strange land” (WW 27). She finds food to eat, washes herself and gets ready for the journey to the Emerald City. Thus, unlike her ancestor heroines of literature, she does not make demands on others. As a modern literary heroine, Dorothy makes demands on herself, empowering her to find her way to return home.

Dorothy exhibits signs of longing something more for herself than what Kansas, Uncle Henry or Aunt Em has to present. Her relationship with her dog provides one such sign; he supplies Dorothy with an outlet from the daily monotonous of living with her aunt and uncle. Toto makes her laugh, and protects her from flourishing as gray as her other atmosphere. “Toto was not gray; he was a little black dog, with long silky hair and small black eyes that twinkled merrily on either side of his funny, wee nose. Toto played all day long, and

Dorothy played with him, and loved him dearly” (WW 11). Unlike the prairie, Dorothy’s house, Uncle Henry, and Aunt Em, Toto, are not gray. Similar to the contrast in colour between Kansas and the Land of Oz, the visual depiction of the dog, juxtaposed with the gray of Kansas forces the peruser to notice Toto, and to see him in the light of what Dorothy does.

If Dorothy’s perceptiveness of the outside world reflects what she feels inside, then her positive idea of Toto depicts a little part of her that has not been dulled by her environment. She loves Toto fondly, and takes him when she starts her adventure to see the Wizard. It is remarkable that during the cyclone, she troubles her life to catch Toto when he jumps out of her arms, however he does not try to save anything. Toto does this again towards the end of the story when he prevents her from getting on the Wizard’s balloon.

Dorothy could have gone down into the cellar and joined Uncle Henry and Aunt Em during the cyclone, yet conditions kept her up in the house and all alone, she is prepared to face her journey: “Toto jumped out of Dorothy’s arms and hid under the bed, and the girl started to get him. Aunt Em, badly frightened, threw open the trap door in the floor and climbed down the ladder into the small, dark hole. Dorothy caught Toto at last, and started to follow her aunt. When she was halfway across the room there came a great shriek from the wind, and the house shook so hard that she lost her footing and sat down suddenly upon the floor” (WW 12).

At this turning point in Dorothy’s life, she can follow Uncle Henry’s and Aunt Em’s downward pathway of boredom and bleakness, or she can follow the upward pathway to delight and self-improvement. Like her aunt and uncle, Dorothy does not climb down the ladder into the small, dark hole; she symbolically looks up at the sky, like her contemporary real heroines who prefer progress.

Baum utilizes color to point out changes in the directions chosen by Uncle Henry, Aunt Em, and Dorothy. Dorothy’s uncle and aunt choose the darkness of the cellar. The sky’s that is being symbolically grayer than usually seen on the day of the cyclone, predicts Uncle Henry’s and Aunt Em’s future. Even though it was dark inside the

cyclone, after Dorothy lands she awakens to the bright sunshine and sparkling colors of Oz. The house in which she remains follows an upward pattern as it is raised higher and higher, at the top of the cyclone. Dorothy's home depicts herself and the rising of the home emphasizes Dorothy's self as the centre of the story. At one point Toto falls through the trap door and Dorothy thought she had lost him, "but soon she saw one of his ears sticking up through the hole, for the strong pressure of the air was keeping him up so that he could not fall" (WW 13). The pressure of the air keeps both Dorothy and Toto in an upward progress, as if their fate to land in Oz was meant to be. Dorothy closes the trap door "so that no more accidents could happen" (WW 13), symbolically closing the door to her past life.

Dorothy's self-reliance portrays the emptiness of Kansas prairie. Her adventure helps her to achieve the entire self she wishes as she symbolically abandons her old self in order to find a new complete one in Oz.

References

- Baum, L. F. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.
Noida: Maple, 2014. Print.
- Greenberg, H. R. *The Movies on Your Mind*.
New York: Saturday Review P, 1975.
Print.
- Rudman, M. K. *Children's Literature: An
Issues Approach*. Massachusetts:
Heath, 1973. Print.
- Sale, Roger. *Fairy Tales and After: From
Snow White to E.B. White*. Cambridge:
Harvard UP, 1979. Print.
- Schneider, Dorothy and Schneider, C. J.
*American Women in the
Progressive Era*. New York: Facts
on File, 1993. Print.