

Amy Lynn Doerner, 4.3 Cultural Appropriation

Another great module this week, as Wizard of Oz is another childhood favorite of mine and many others. It's a fabulous adventure story of dreams, magical people and places, and several misfortunes along the way. Baum writes an amazing tale of a young girl whisked by a cyclone and stranded into a far off land where she meets four smaller sized people and a witch. Having never read the original story until now, and having watched the movie several times, I was absolutely amazed at how different the two versions were. Short from telling the story of a young girl who ends up in a new land, travels to Oz with a few friends she meets along the way, and ends up finding her way back home, not much else remains true to the original story version written in 1900 by Baum.

The 1939 movie version seems somewhat of a spectacular accomplishment during that time period experimenting with different camera techniques, Technicolor, and extravagant costume and makeup ideas, something possibly very new during that time period. I am not sure the movie was created with fidelity to the original story version though, as many events were different or left out. Dorothy's journey to Oz did begin with a cyclone (or twister as noted in the movie) and she was whisked away, however her adventure was only a dream.

It was a very long journey to reach the wizard and in the book several instances are mentioned where Dorothy and friends often stopped along the way to rest for the night in cottages of people they met along the way. In the movie these events never take place until they get to the poppy field and rest what seems like a long time as they wake up to falling snow. What was the purpose of MGM studio and filmmakers turning Dorothy's adventure into a dream? Did they feel the story would appeal to more people, were they trying to relate to the magic of childhood dreams? It was a huge change to the original story.

In the book the farmhands, Hickory, Zeke and Hank do not exist, but in the movie they play a pretty big role, not only as farmhands in the beginning of the story, but also as an illusion of the scarecrow, tinman and lion that Dorothy befriends. That

was also a pretty big change in the movie from the book that I was curious as to how the idea of those individuals came about. Glinda the good witch did exist in both versions, however in the book she is not the one who greeted Dorothy when she landed from the cyclone and was the witch of the south as opposed to the north. Another major change was the task that was asked of Dorothy by the Wizard before her wish could be granted. In the movie Dorothy is asked to apprehend and return with the broomstick that belongs to the Wicked Witch of the West, but in the original story she is asked to kill the witch. That was a pretty substantial change, as is also one of the reasons I personally felt the story version might be a little scary for children at times.

So thinking back to previous modules and things we have been discussing (literary elements, fidelity to the original, etc) I believe that Wizard of Oz is an example of a film that was created without staying “true” to the original version, as well as a case where the film was much more popular than the original book. When you ask children or adults about Wizard of Oz, the majority of them respond with the fact that they have watched the movie several times with never any mention of having read the book (myself included). I teach fifth grade and know for a fact if I took a survey of which students had read the book Wizard of Oz, very few, if any would raise their hand. I had never really paid much attention to this fact before, but am amazed at how few people have enjoyed the works of Baum and his story.

So why is this? As a society have we been exposed to so much technology that no one picks up a book anymore unless using a kindle or IPAD? Are we always in such a “hurry” that it is much quicker to just watch the movie? I am not sure, as this wasn’t true for Charlotte’s Web, and even though they are picture books, most people have read Jumanji or The Polar Express. If you were to survey a group of people and ask if they have ever read Charlotte’s Web, most likely several will respond with yes that they have.

So why is it different for the Wizard of Oz? Maybe because it was a movie created like no other during that time, using special effects that most hadn’t...I am not sure, just merely speculating here. Personally I feel if you read the book and watch the movie, you almost develop a sense of appreciation for the story and what the author was feeling or experiencing while creating it.

With the popularity of the movie even still today, you can find Wizard of Oz

merchandise in the stores. Dorothy costumes, the famous Ruby Red slippers (from the movie as they were silver in the book), figurines etc. So what happens to the original book? Does it simply continue to get ignored? Do we push to encourage our young readers to give it a chance and read it? As an educator I know I can incorporate the book into my classroom as a literature circle and do the very thing we are doing right now with a comparing and contrasting activity. The students would love the opportunity to “watch” a movie in class, so why not take advantage and use it as a learning opportunity as I am not a “movie player” in my room.

Like Charlotte’s Web, the Wizard of Oz also incorporated a lot of singing into the storyline making it somewhat of a musical. I question if this too was done as a technique to appeal to younger viewers as the famous songs and lines such as “no place like home”, “we’re off to see the wizard”, “lions, tigers, and bears oh my” and “follow the yellow brick road” are embedded into every young mind. Personally I felt the songs were strategically used throughout the movie, and weren’t distracting to the viewer.

In the movie, when Miss Gulch is frantically pedaling up to Dorothy’s house to tell Auntie Em and Uncle Henry about what Toto had done, the music gets louder and quicker. The change in music lets the viewer know that something is about to happen, and gives them a sense of what the character is feeling. You could clearly tell that Miss Gulch was upset; the music just added the extra touch.

I also noticed different strategies or techniques used by the cameraman. For example, when Dorothy and her friends first reach the Emerald City, the camera spans the entire scenery creating a sense of magic for the viewer. The same thing happened when they were resting in the poppy field. The camera then too scanned over the entire field, allowing the viewer to see the rows and rows of poppies where the group realized they were so close to their destination. There were also some focal points that I noticed, one being when Dorothy first runs away and ends up at Mr. Marvel’s wagon. He has her look into the crystal ball, and the camera focuses in on the faces that Mr. Marvel’s face. This allows the viewer to infer that he is clearly making up what he is seeing, just trying to convince Dorothy to return home.

Needless to say, for the most part up until this module, I had found most books and movies that I have read/watched to be true to the original version aside from

Jumanji to a certain extent. However, I again was amazed at how different the book was from the movie in the case of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, and am slightly bummed that I never had read the book first. I truly think that seeing the movie so many times before, that the book was almost ruined for me from the start. It was a quick read, and I did enjoy it, just the movie to me offers so much more. Regardless of what I think, the movie is a fascinating fairy tale that provides children the magical opportunity to dream of faraway places and mysterious lands. All the while teaching them that famous message that, "there is no place like home".