

## Reflection on Cultural Appropriation

After reflecting on this week's viewings/readings, I have been able to apply new knowledge to my overall understanding of reading a film, fidelity to an original, and cultural appropriation. *The Wizard of Oz* is the perfect example of a book and film that are each complex and unique which resulted in its popularity today. I have immersed myself in each version with varying perspectives and have come to several conclusions regarding fidelity, similarities to other well-known films, problematic aspects, and thoughts on a new *The Wizard of Oz* directed by Nicole Kassell.

Victor Fleming's film is far more popular than L. Frank Baum's original book, but does that mean the book should become obsolete? As stated in a previous reflection, we are now in the context of a high-tech world full of digital natives. People are more fluent in navigating a complex computer application and struggle to read a physical novel. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is what paved the way to the success of the 1939 film, the Broadway musical *Wicked*, and many others that fans should be able to appreciate both. Victor Fleming's shares his concerns in an interview because he was unsure that he could live up to L. Frank Baum's vision. Just because one gained more attention than the other does not mean L. Frank Baum should be unacknowledged for his writing, creativity, and input in creating the motion picture.

Since I was more familiar with the film than the book, I found myself saying, *this didn't happen in the movie!* more often than not. In reality, I should have been expecting the film to be an accurate representation of the book if I read the book first. I was familiar with the general plot of the story and it was still an enjoyable read. I cannot say I am too attached to the film because there were many scenes I didn't recall since last watching it randomly on TBS. I always accepted the film at face value as a feel-good storyline where a girl finds new friends in a magical universe. The catchy musical numbers and vibrant background was reminiscent of an innocent childhood. However, after diving deeper into the film and book, there is far more to decipher about the development of characters, plot, and theme.

Since we focused on fidelity to the original in the previous week, I wondered if my stance would remain the same as it did when reflecting on *Where the Wild Things Are*. I was originally convinced that a film stays true to a book by conveying the same emotions as an author is able to do to its readers. While this remains true for *The Wizard of Oz*, the concept and extravagant costumes and setting is so compelling and makes you want to watch it whether you read the book or not. After researching the development of the film, Victor Fleming's was intentional in everything that was put into the movie. From the use of technicolor, intricate illusion of the tornado, and elaborate costumes, the Land of Oz was brought to life. Readers may have envisioned Oz to look differently than it did, but the film was designed with such effort and originality that it stands out from the book in the best way possible.

*The Wizard of Oz*, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Where the Wild Things Are* have several commonalities that make each one tasteful and memorable. The use of musical numbers to convey an emotional scene and being able to metaphorically address adult issues through a younger person's lens are incorporated into these films. In *Charlotte's Web*, we uncover the meaning of unconditional friendship through the relationships between Fern and Wilbur, and Charlotte and Wilbur. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, the author addresses the confusing

emotions in both children and adults and how they are sometimes difficult to articulate unless they experience it themselves. *Where the Wild Things Are* and *The Wizard of Oz* share more of a common theme that running away from your problems does not enhance a person's life. Dorothy finds herself missing her aunt and uncle and appreciating her life in Kansas. Max also begins to miss home where he was loved by his family, even after getting into an argument with his mom and biting her before running away. Though these films are not the same in terms of storyline, they tackle difficult topics through fictional characters that are enjoyed by people of all ages.

One thing that I wrestled with was the repeated violence in L. Frank Baum's book. The book is considered a children's novel, so it was unexpected to read about the killing of wolves and bees. The author writes about these instances simply as a matter of fact. The same could go for *Little Red Riding Hood* where the wolf eats her grandmother. The characters have no reaction toward these actions and carry on with their adventure. Considering this book was written in a different context, this behavior might have been normal to see in a children's book. Older youth may appreciate reading about these actions as it makes the story more exciting and climactic. While I take this aspect of the book with a grain of salt, I have to wonder what it would look like if the book were more accurately made into a motion picture. Depending on the directors take, how much blood would be left on the yellow brick road? Would the movie be too violent to be considered "family friendly"? How much can a director stretch a movie that it transforms into a different genre?

Another thing I had a gripe about the book was the stereotypical behaviors of the characters. I can recount at least five times where Dorothy says, "What should we do now?" In a time where gender roles are being challenged, it causes me to reflect on the way Dorothy is portrayed. She is treated like a princess while in Oz and expects her male acquaintances to problem solve for her. Though this may not have been L. Frank Baum's intention, her lack of independence is highlighted in the book. There are other instances of stereotypical behavior when Dorothy assumes that all witches are ugly, and how the Tinman, Scarecrow, and Lion manifest their lack of a heart, courage, and brain. Their sense of helplessness and low self-esteem prove to be incorrect by the obstacles they overcome. But they continue to belittle themselves rather than acknowledge their resiliency against adversity.

According to articles from *Variety* and *The Guardian*, a new *Wizard of Oz* remake is in the works and will be a "fresh take on Dorothy and the Land of Oz" (Rubin, 2021). While sticking to the theme of gender roles, I wonder if Dorothy's character will be portrayed similarly to the previous versions, or if she will take on the role as the dominant female character. I assume the latter, but there has been speculation in regard to the success of this upcoming film. Ben Child explains the premise of *The Wizard of Oz* as "too hokey to appeal in the modern day" (2021). Ben Child may have some merit to his thoughts, but the film could be a success if the female director approaches the movie carefully.

## References

Child, B. (2021, Feb 11). Is the new wizard of oz reboot doomed to fail like all the others? The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/feb/11/is-the-new-wizard-of-oz-reboot-doomed-to-fail-like-all-the-others>

Rubin, R. (2021, Feb 9). "Wizard of Oz' Remake in the Works at New Line with Director Nicole Kassell. Variety. <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/wonderful-wizard-of-oz-remake-1234904194/>