

FLF: parallels to Oz

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 15 Dec 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 15 Dec 2002, 22:01

William Ansley wrote:

As I have said many times before, I have always found the Oz parallels in FLF to be rather superficial. Sure there are some references to the movie, but I have found all attempts to draw deeper parallels to be strained at best. Especially since Wolfe demonstrated just how thoroughly he could incorporate Oz lore in one of his stories in "The Eyeflash Miracles."

Anyway, you are thinking of General Jinjur's Army of Revolt ("We are revolting!" "You don't look it.") in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. In this book the Emerald City is conquered by an army of girls (that is, young women). They are assured of victory because, as Jinjur says, "What man would oppose a girl, or dare to harm her? And there is not an ugly face in my entire Army." And, just in case, they all have sharp knitting needles thrust in their hair, which they use to great effect as weapons.

These girls are from all four parts of the land of Oz, but Baum mentions this mainly, it seems, as an excuse to describe their costumes in great detail. They wear green blouses and skirts that are one quarter blue, yellow, red and purple. They also have four buttons on their blouse of the same colors. The color of the front section of the skirt and of the topmost button indicate which part of Oz the wearer comes from.

(Baum may have been satirizing the women's suffrage movement; it is hard to be sure.)

I don't think my information contradicts your theory, but it may weaken it, since the most important characteristic of the Army of Revolt was that it was made up of girls, not that it was a coalition from all "four corners" of the land of Oz.

I will agree that from an Oz-book perspective it is pretty superficial, but the obverse, from the Oz-movie(s) perspective of 1980s American society at large, I continue to think that it is somewhat deeper.

People who only know Oz from the musical (i.e., the mass of the American public) would find the notion of the Emerald City under siege to be alien, or even a juvenile parody of a classic. Yet it actually happens in book 2, as I alluded and you named, and it seems to happen in *THE EMERALD CITY OF OZ* (perhaps even in *THE MAGIC OF OZ*), judging by the blurbs . . . and these are only the Baum books.

For it to be a closer imitation of *THE MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ*, the defenders of the Free house would have to be the four characters and the aggressors would have to be a horde of girl scouts. Even a simple reversal would mean that the defenders would be girl scouts blocking

access to the condemned house. Since none of the FLF-characters would logically have access to 100 rapid-deployment girl scouts, such a tale would require a different character who did have such.

In a sense, even while Baum is poking fun at the suffragettes, he is anticipating the military genius of Gandhi in using noncombatants to achieve military goals without using death or terror. The use of businessmen as unwitting defenders in FLF strikes me as being quite similar.

Large scale battles in Oz, in my limited reading, seem to often (always?) have comedic elements. Again this fits in with the screwball comedy siege in FLF.

There is also the matter of the differences between movies and books. The movie is famous for its "it was all a dream" aspect, where the characters in real Kansas were mapped out onto characters in Oz; but this is practically anathema to the Oz books (Oz is a real place, not a dream place; etc.). The movie makes a big play out of how the favorite treasures each companion received from the Wizard was really nothing -- that each had possessed the brains, heart, and courage that he wanted all along; again, this is at strong variance with the Oz books and the Oz world, if not anathematic (the treasures are real, even as they are funny to author and the readers, they are still real to the recipients and the world they live in--iirc, Glinda never says "you had it all along" except for the very different case of Dorothy's silver shoes, with which she could have returned to Kansas on the first day, but then it is quickly noted that such an action would have deprived her (then future) companions of their dreams being answered).

Baum did not live to see the musical made, so he never had to (or had the opportunity to) write Oz books that bridged the gaps between books and movie. (In the way that Jeter has written sequels to the movie "Bladerunner" which grapple with the gaps between that movie and its inspiration DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?) FREE LIVE FREE, which is mainly couched in Oz-terms via the movie, takes on both of these major variants ("dream" and "you had it all along") and puts them through a process which I think re-Ozifies them.

In FLF, the "dream" was not a dream, but an imploded timeline (Oz is not a dream place). In FLF, "you had it all along" is true, in a sense, but tied up in the action of the quest (the "doing") and the folding into a previous self (the melding of one's present self into a past self, which produces an alloyed self as well as a "dream").

Granted all this, I still hope that my interpretation can aspire to the lofty ranks of "strained," but I recognize this is only wishful thinking. So we will just file it under "Opinion" and move on.

=mantis=