



**‘There is no place like home’: A Comparative Study of the  
Meaning of Home in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and  
*Peter and Wendy***

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**Abstract**

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *Peter and Wendy* present universal ideas that exist in all times, despite being written in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most significant ones is the concept of “home”. The article discusses the essentiality of the idea of “home” where the identity of an individual shapes, and where one’s spiritual, psychological, and physical being develop. It also studies the attitudes of each protagonist towards the concept of ‘home’ based on their understanding of it and according to their gender differences. The characters in both stories tread on the path of perplexity between leaving their homes and returning to them. Peter’s world is the world of imagination while Dorothy laments and longs to return to Kansas wherein her family is and her roots were cultivated. Nonetheless, both character’s inner being is aware of the necessity of home and family to attain the settlement and security.

**Key words:**

Home, Orphans, Children’s Literature, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Peter and Wendy*.



Children's literature is full of stories about "home". Being a central idea or a secondary one, "home" always exists to convey a strong message to readers. Whether the house in its physical form is a cave or hut, a farm house or tree house, big or small, it is usually present to offer shelter and protection, for its inhabitants. However, little protagonists usually tend to venture out of their safe homes and start their journeys alone. Others are obliged to go through certain quests. The end is always "home," but after gaining an understanding of the real meaning of home and what it represents to them. Two famous works of children's literature that present the idea of home are J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911) and L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). Those great novels share many similarities, such as belonging to genre of fantasy, having orphan protagonists, and dealing with the idea of starting a journey, yet they offer different views concerning the concept of home. The article discusses the way that homes in both novels operate to establish special and spiritual meaning to the protagonists. It also studies the attitudes of each protagonist toward the concept of "home" based on their understanding of it and according to their gender differences.

Many researchers have examined the etymology of the word "Home" as part of a broader meaning. In his essay on the uses of the term in particular in Western languages, Hollander notes that the Germanic words for "Home", *Heim*, *ham*, *heem*, are derived from the Indo-European *kei* meaning lying down and something dear or beloved. In other words, it means something like a place to lay one's head. He suggests that the German word for house, thought of as a building where people live, or a dwelling place for



a family, is imbued with the sense of home. In English, the term “Home” derives from the Anglo-Saxon word *ham*, meaning “village, estate or town” (35). The word *House* usually refers to the same idea of “Home”.

Defining the concept of *home* sheds the light on its significance in both novels. Clearly the term home refers to a complex entity which depends on the person’s understanding to its aspects. Home implies inter-related and at times contradictory socio-cultural ideas about people’s relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces, and things. It can be a dwelling place or a lived space of interaction between people, and places; or perhaps both. The boundaries of home can be permeable and/or impermeable. Home can be fixed and stable and/or mobile and changing. It can be associated with feelings of comfort and ease or intimacy; it also can be an expression of one’s identity and sense of self and/or one’s body might be home to the self. Equally, it can provide a context for analysing ideas and practices about intimacy, family, kinship, and gender. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard explains that each house symbolises that place of our earliest years and the nurturing cradle of those years. Bachelard observes that before Man is cast into the world he “is laid in the cradle of the house. In this sense, the house is “a large cradle ... Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (7). Pauline Dewan in her book *The House as Setting, Symbol, and Structural Motif in Children's Literature* suggests that “House” and its attendant “home” embrace a complex of experiences, myths, political realities and desires. It is the space in which one gains a mythos of origin, one measures one’s development, one experiences justice or injustice, healing love or its opposite, and one steps into new social roles, some desired and others imposed. The concept of the house implies a certain extent of spirituality. In the human imagination, the



sense of home can expand to include the entire earth, even the universe, or contract into the smallest spaces. Concerning concept and symbol, then, the house can be seen as variable. Across cultures, the idea of home stands as a central motif and human obsession. In children's and young adult literature, however, the house is particularly resonant, for maturation, identity, and adaptation to life's circumstances are such central themes. The home, as scholar Dewan asserts, is "a child's first universe" (4).

The relationship between gender and home is clearly stated in the novels. Peter Pan and Dorothy are two protagonists have opposite attitudes in dealing with the concept of home. The reason is mainly their gender. Written in the beginning of the 20th century, they represent the same values of the time in terms of gender. Somerville suggests that home has a different meaning for women than for men. This difference tends to be obscured, however, because of the nature of domestic work, as something done out of love rather than for material gain. Early writers on gendered perceptions of home claim that men consider it to be a signifier of status and achievement, whereas women view home as a haven. Both men and women consider home to be where the heart is, but love means unpaid caring and labour for women, whereas for men it means emotional stability and gratification(235).

In the world of fantasy, Events occur outside the ordinary laws that operate within the universe. Louisa Smith suggests that in children's literature of the fantastic the chief human actors are children who are parents-free; obviously, orphans are the best choice for achieving such missions (447). In "Awakening the Hero Within", Carol Pearson outlines specific objectives and practices of the orphan as an archetype in the world. The goal of the orphan is to find security for fear of being exploited. He or



she is going to deal with a problem by allowing it total control, hoping for salvation, or grudgingly acquiescing to its demands. An orphan's task is to reckon with pain and disillusionment and to be receptive to the help others provide. The special qualities he or she possesses to handle these problems and tasks are a realistic approach to life, recognition of his or her condition, and an ability to work with others (82). Peter Pan and Dorothy represent the perfect examples as they start their journeys alone, free from any adult guidance.

Literary characters tend to see their homes in different ways. Lucy Waddy in her article 'Home in Children's Fiction: Three Patterns' explains that as a child begins to walk and talk, he explores his home. Then, he chafes at the enclosure of his backyard, and finds that interesting things happen away from home. Because home is his anchor and refuge, he feels free to explore. Waddy classifies protagonists as Odyssean, Oedipal, and Promethean. Dorothy belongs to the odyssean pattern. According to this pattern, home is usually an important theme. The characters tend to romanticize their homes; their memories invest the simplest hut with rich beauty, because they feel that they are safe and truly belong there (13).

After landing in Oz, Dorothy tells the grandmotherly 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?" (Baum 47). Throughout the novel, Dorothy reiterates this desire to return home; at one point, she tells the Scarecrow, "No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home" (75).



Waddy's second classification of characters are the ones who tend to create homes for themselves, and, as they do, they become more fond of what they have created and more defined by it. Their home becomes their alter ego. She calls this category the Promethean pattern, for the characters have left one home and, usually through a good deal of work, create another (13). Peter Pan belongs to this category. He builds his own kingdom out of make-believe and he is very satisfied with it. The difference between him and the other boys at such a time is that they know it is make-believe; while to him make-believe and the real world are exactly the same thing. If they break down in their make-believe, he punishes them.

Both Baum and Barrie in *Peter and Wendy* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* presented the two settings with home as a central idea. In the genre of fantasy, realistic settings are often called primary worlds; fantasy settings are called secondary worlds. Baum starts his novel with Dorothy being taken away with her house into a strange land. From the moment of her arrival, she finds herself obliged to go in a journey in order to return to Kansas, her own home. The writer presents both Kansas (primary world) and the Land of Oz (secondary world) as being opposites. The way he describes each of the worlds is full of contradicting details starting with the colours, ending with the people living in them.

Gardener states that Baum is clearly contrasting the greatness of life on the Kansas farm and the solemnity of Uncle Henry and Aunt Em, with the colour and gaiety of Oz (16). The Kansas prairie is vast and monochromatic, with dangerous cyclones and an absence of beauty. It turns the once-pretty and young Aunt Em into an old, dour woman before her time. Dorothy lives there in which there is nothing to see except gray prairies. The sun has baked



the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. There are no trees which makes the land lack the colour green. Even the grass is not green for the sun has burned the tops of the long blades until they are the same gray colour to be seen everywhere. The colour of the house that was once painted became gray after the rain washed its original colour (Baum 18). An opposite image is drawn to describe the Land of Oz. The cyclone takes Dorothy and her house to a country of marvelous beauty as Baum tells his readers. There are lovely patches of green sward everywhere with stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits. Banks of gorgeous flowers line every road, and birds with rare and brilliant plumage sing and flutter in the trees and bushes. There is also a small brook rushing and sparkling along between green banks (54). Most of its inhabitants are cheerful, helpful, and virtuous. It seems strange that Dorothy would want to leave this land for her home. However, the importance of realizing the significance of one's roots prevails. Dorothy never questions her return. She is from Kansas, her guardians are there, and she has duties to fulfill. She finds much to love about Oz, but knows it is not where she belongs.

In *Peter and Wendy*, the primary setting is London while the secondary one is Neverland. The novel opens in the nursery of the Darling family household in Bloomsbury, London. The family is somewhat impoverished, employing Nana, a Newfoundland dog, as the three children's nurse. Despite being poor, the narrator describes them as "there never was a simpler, happier family" (Barrie 17). Neverland is drawn as the paradise like place for children. The island is so fascinating that it attracts all children to imagine it. It is children's paradise where there are no schools and no duties. It is a place where fairies fly and mermaids swim near the shore.



If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely pale colours suspended in the darkness...This is the nearest you ever get to in on the mainland, just one heavenly moment; if there could be two moments you might see the surf and hear the mermaid's singing.( xxxv)

When Wendy arrives in Neverland, she is shot down and Peter Pan and the Lost Boys build the walls of domesticity around her. Although they make a special house for Wendy according to how she wishes it to be, she is confined to her role as a mother. She does not have Tinkerbell's freedom or Tiger Lily's leadership, as she leads a tribe of men in Neverland. Wendy defines herself by her home and they build her a house as she desires:

'I wish I had a pretty house, The littlest ever seen,  
With funny little red walls, And roof of mossy  
green.'

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"We've built the little walls and roof  
And made a lovely door, So tell us, mother Wendy,  
What are you wanting more?" To this she answered  
greedily: "Oh, really next I think I'll have Gay  
windows all about,  
With roses peeping in, you know, And babies  
peeping out'. (84)

The concept of home might differ according to each protagonist's gender. It revolves around two significant ideas of identity and motherhood. In addition to those, both texts at times show a kind of confusion inside each protagonist concerning the definition of home. They tend to teach themselves how to define "home" and determine what it means to them.





Depres refers to the relation between home and identity and/or the concept of the self. He claims for example that the home is an *expression* or *symbol* of the self (98). Dorothy's relationship with the place she came from is an obvious, certain one and repeated throughout the pages of the novel. Baum wants to emphasize the importance of "home" and how it refers to belonging to many people. Ironically, the scarecrow is wondering how Dorothy wishes to return to Kansas and leave the beautiful Land of Oz.

'Tell me something about yourself and the country you came from,' said the Scarecrow, when she had finished her dinner. So she told him all about Kansas, and how gray everything was there, and how the cyclone had carried her to this queer Land of Oz.

The Scarecrow listened carefully, and said, "I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas'. (Baum 76)

Dorothy replies that he is unable to understand because he has no brains. This hidden relationship between the ability to think and having one's home sheds the light on the significance of having a private space to belong to. Therefore, she never questions her return. She is from Kansas, her guardians are there, and she has duties to fulfill. She finds much to love about Oz but knows it is not where she belongs. Baum knew that no matter how fascinating or exotic a place, it is always more comforting to be in a familiar setting. He understood his intended audience well. The constant traveling and the long journey increase Dorothy's desire to return home and enjoy the company of her uncle and aunt.



Baum, smartly, makes Dorothy's return to her home one of the significant themes in the novel as he is fully aware the American mood of the beginning of the 20th century. As a female character representing the ideas of that time, Dorothy misses the domestic atmosphere she used to live. By the turn of the century, American magazines, art galleries, and novels were flooded with advice about how to be a proper woman in middle class society. With industrialization, urbanization, a declining birth rate, increased divorce rate, and a shift away from the home, Americans feared that their families would fall apart. As a result, one of the most significant changes to American culture in the late 19th century was the transformation in the perception and representation of gender roles due, in large part, to the evolution of the role of the home. There was a sense of disempowerment resulted in an understanding of the home as the last refuge for traditional values for both men and women. However, It was the husband's role to maintain the structure and the yard but not to perform domestic chores (Trachtenberg).

Richard Selcer argues that the notion of home refers to much more than a house and family. For him, home "has become more than a place to Americans; it is an institution. During the good times in our history, it has been a symbol of everything good in American life. During the bad times, its status has been used as a yardstick for the decline of America" (qtd. in Mackey-Kallis 127). Therefore, as Alissa Burger suggests , the representations of home and family featured in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* can be read as indicative of not only the role of women within the sphere of domesticity is shown here, but also of the larger sociocultural milieu inspiring such a story (159- 60).

The first line in Peter and Wendy starts with "All children, except



one, grow up.” (Barrie 1). It is Peter Pan who refuses to grow up and prefers to live in Neverland forever as a child. Neverland is the only place that can present him what he wishes for. He is afraid of commitment that adults' world revolve around. When Mrs. Darling asks him to stay with the other children, he replies:

“I don’t want to go to school and learn solemn things,” he told her passionately. “I don’t want to be a man. O Wendy’s mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard!”  
“Peter,” said Wendy the comforter, “I should love you in a beard”; and Mrs. Darling stretched out her arms to him, but he repulsed her.  
“Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man.”  
“But where are you going to live?”  
“With Tink in the house we built for Wendy. (93)

As a male orphan he sets his own rules that others should follow. He is more of a leader than a friend. The power of imagination that Peter Pan has enables him to set the boundaries of his own space and calls it home. Through imagination, he can shape his own world free of commitments, free of emotions, and free of adults authority. Gaston Bachelard writes about the house, noting “if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.” He elaborates on his ideas saying:

“Now my aim is clear: I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and



dreams of mankind. The binding principle in the integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. In the life of man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is a body and soul. It is the human being's first world.”  
(6-7)

In fact, Neverland is Peter’s home; the place where he really belongs. Peter Pan belongs to this island and considers it his home. Even the island has been described as knowing Peter and interacts with him through different ways:

“Feeling that Peter was on his way back, the Neverland had again woke into life. ... In his absence things are usually quiet on this island. The fairies take an hour longer in the morning, the beasts attend to the young, the redskins feed heavily for six days and nights, and when pirates and lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs to each other. But with the coming of Peter, who hates lethargy, they are under way again: if you put your ear to the ground now, you would hear the whole island seething with life.” (Barrie 64)

According to the narrator’s description, Neverland moves to action on Peter's return. This can be analysed as a reference to a colonial style of



leadership. The island and its inhabitants relax in the absence of their master. However, Peter behaves in a childish way most of the time. He deals with everyday life as a game of make-believe. Barrie describes one of their meals as “happened to be a make- believe tea, and they sat round the board, guzzling in their greed; and really, what with their chatter and recriminations, the noise, as Wendy said, was positively deafening’ (117).

Ironically, all male characters who represent “heads” of houses act passively; Mr. Darling, head of the house, spends much of the time in the kennel, Peter, head of the house, is indeed a very troubled character, and Hook, captain of the ship is pretty melancholic and unloved.

However, there are some hints in both texts reveal a hidden struggle inside both protagonists concerning the meaning of home. Through her journey, Dorothy keeps trying to explain her home, Kansas, to individuals who have never heard of it. “I don’t know... But it is my home, and I'm sure it's somewhere,” she tells one man (Baum 167). It is noticeable that Kansas is an anonymous place for all the characters living in the Land of Oz including the new comer, Dorothy. No one ever has ever heard about it, even Dorothy does not know the way to it. Every time she meets a new character, she expresses her wish to return to Kansas despite her complete ignorance about where it is located. Interestingly, The Wizard of Oz also has no idea about it. He promises Dorothy to take her with him as he assumes that it lies after the desert. He admits that he is not sure about Kansas for he has not the faintest notion which way it lies, but the first thing to do is to cross the desert, and then it should be easy to find the way home’ (287).

The vagueness that surrounds Kansas is part due to the fact that it is the only real place in the novel. No wizards and witches live there and this



leads the wizard of Oz to return to it. He is the second human character, in addition to Dorothy, who prefers the real world with all its negatives in the hypothetical world which imposes difficult rules on its dwellers. There is a clear dividing line between the two worlds. Only characters belonging to the real world are able to travel between them. This fact is well reflected when the monkeys refuse to take Dorothy to Kansas as it is located outside their land. When a comparison is made between living in the Land of Oz and setting in a difficult journey to return to Kansas, Kansas surely wins it. Another reason of her confusion lies in outlining the concept of home. Dorothy's struggle to define home and her failure in offering a description of its location may be due to uncertainty of what home means to her or even whether home might not always be there or static or reliable. She witnesses the house flew away to another strange land which proves how fragile it is.

Peter does not show any emotion toward home or family unless they are make-believe. The exception is one occasion when he admits the reason behind his hatred for mothers. He reveals this secret when he sees that the Darlings' children decide to return to their family and home; "Long ago," he said, "I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me, so I stayed away for moons and moons and moons, and then flew back; but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed" (Barrie 127). Kathleen Kelley-Laine claims that Peter Pan's problem of returning home lies in the essential factor of time. Peter had lost his mother, but in fact it was he who had left to play with the fairies (103). The symbolism of the house is associated with enclosed and protected space similar to the mother's



womb. In fact, it is the first place in each person's life. Being an enclosed space it serves as a haven and protection from the outside world. When Peter does not feel this meaning, he decides to act independently and separate himself from anything has a relation to mothers and home alike. He pretends to be unmoved by the children's departure. Any attempt to make him change his opinion is fruitless. He believes that Neverland represents home for him. He understands home as a place where he uses his imagination and stays a child forever. He is not ready to sacrifice home for family so he prefers to stay alone in Neverland rather than living in the Darling's house.

Motherhood represents a significant component in the concept of home for both Dorothy and Peter Pan. Dorothy says from the beginning that the return to her Aunt Em is her primary objective, and this alone is the reason for bearing all the difficulties in the journey. This mixing of emotions regarding home and motherhood is natural, as each of them represents the other in the child's unconsciousness. Dorothy worries about how Aunt Em might be anxious about her whereabouts. One of the saddest moments in the novel is when she realizes that her return to Kansas is almost impossible. The Wizard of Oz asks her to kill the horrible Witch of West; an action he could not be achieve. Her weeping reveals how she misses her aunt and uncle.

Dorothy's life became very sad as she grew to understand that it would be harder than ever to get back to Kansas and Aunt Em again. Sometimes she would cry bitterly for hours, with Toto sitting at her feet looking into her face, whining dismally to show how sorry he was for his little mistress. Toto did not



really care whether he was in Kansas or the Land of Oz so long as Dorothy was with him; but he knew the little girl was unhappy, and that made him unhappy too. (Baum 223)

Dorothy's meeting with Aunt Em is touching and tells a lot about the affection and love that surrounds their life before going to the Land of Oz. Aunt Em covers Dorothy with kisses and hugs and ends the novel with her question "where in the world did you come from?"(367).

Unlike Dorothy, Peter Pan hates mothers. He states this fact unequivocally. However, he is aware that the Lost Boys are in need of one so he comes to the Darling children's window to hear their stories and relate them to his friends. Wendy says that she knows lots of stories, so Peter teaches her how to fly so she can come to Neverland and tell stories to the Lost Boys. The moment she arrives, she starts to act as a mother, a task she works hard to do it perfectly. Even Captain Hook wants her to be a mother to the pirates. Motherhood for Peter is equal to domesticity; a mother is a person who takes care of others. He denies any emotional need to have her in his life. He refuses to be adopted and prefers to stay alone without a mother in Neverland.

Peter Pan and Dorothy lead dangerous adventures in new, far, and exotic lands. However, home is the place where they are supposed to return as the starting and the end point of their journey. The physical meaning of home proves to be unimportant to both Dorothy and Peter Pan. Dorothy leaves her farmhouse and searches for Kansas to be with her aunt while Peter Pan neglects the home he built for Wendy that she needs to visit annually to do the housework.

Peter Pan draws his identity from Neverland and considers it a kind





of root to his existence. As a male character Peter prefers the adventurous life so he refuses to leave it. By this decision of staying, he loses the company of the Darlings and the Lost Boys. Unlike Peter Pan, Dorothy represents the feminine concerns of that time. She has a certain kind of commitment to her home. For her, home is where a loving family lives, even if a mere foster family. Emotional bonds with family do not terrify her. In fact, emotional bonds strengthen her belonging to the home. It represents a root for her and builds her self-confidence. Dorothy also sacrifices the chance to be with her friend in the beautiful the Land of Oz and returns to her home in Kansas. Interestingly, both characters have a certain paradise-like image of home. They consider it a paradise where they can fulfill their dreams.

The meaning of home emerges from the process of controlling and acting up in ones environment. This process includes people's physical and emotional involvement with their dwelling unit. Depending on the gender of the occupants, it provides a sense of achievement and control, a place for self expression, and a place for freedom and action. Peter and Dorothy go through difficult journeys to reach at the end what they are searching for. The journeys are full of adventures, lessons to be learned, friends to help, and dreams to achieve. Both character's inner being is aware of the necessity of home to attain the plain of joy and security.



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## لا يوجد مكان مثل المنزل : "دراسة مقارنة لمعنى" البيت " في روايتي ساحر أوز العجيب وبيتر و ويندي

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### خلاصة البحث

تقدم روايتي ساحر أوز العجيب ل ل. فرانك بوم وبيتر ويندي ل ج. م. باري افكار شاملة و حية في كل الازمان على الرغم من صدورهما في بداية القرن العشرين و يتجسد مفهوم " البيت " من بين اهمها . تتناقش المقالة ضرورة فكرة " البيت " حيث تتشكل شخصية الفرد ويتطور روحيا و نفسيا و جسديا و تدرس ايضا سلوك كل بطل في كلتا الروايتين على أساس استيعابهم لهذا المفهوم ووفقا لاختلافات جنسهم . حيث تتجسد حيرة كل بطل في الرواية بين مغادرة بيوتهم و الرجوع اليها في النهاية فنجد عالم بيتر بان ملئ بالخيال بينما يلامس عالم دوروثي الواقع و يتمثل في توقعها الشديد للعودة الى بيتها في كنساس , على الرغم من ذلك يدرك كلا البطلين اهمية " البيت " و العائلة ليحسوا بالاستقرار و الامان.

الكلمة المفتاحية : البيت , الايتام , ادب الاطفال , ساحر اوز العجيب , بيتر و ويندي

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