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Home in Baum's Oz Books.

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If I Ever Go Looking for My Heart's Desire: "Home" in Baum's "Oz" Books

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**If I Ever Go Looking for My Heart's Desire:
"Home" in Baum's "Oz" Books**

Joel D. Chaston (bio)

At the conclusion of the 1939 MGM motion picture version of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy Gale makes a statement that sums up one of the film's major themes. "Oh, but anyway, Toto," she exclaims, "we're home—home! And this is my room—and you're all here—and I'm not going to leave here ever again, because I love you all! And . . . oh, Aunt Em, there's no place like home!" (Langley et al. 132) Anyone who has seen this film will remember Judy Garland's countless declarations that she wants to go home again and particularly her confession to Glinda that "if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard; because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with!" (128). In the end, Dorothy learns that the secret to getting back to Kansas is to click the heels of the Ruby Slippers together three times and say, "There's no place like home; there's no place like home . . ." (129). The film's interest in home is certainly not accidental. Arthur Freed, who assisted producer Mervyn LeRoy, told screen writer, Noel Langley, that he should remember at all times "that Dorothy is only motivated by one object in Oz; that is, how to get back home to her Aunt Em, and every situation should be related to this main drive" (qtd. in Hearn 12).

The motion picture version of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) has, of course, greatly shaped many readers' impressions of the book. In the novel, however, Baum presents a much more ambivalent attitude toward "home." While it is true that, in the last chapter of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy exclaims, "I'm so glad to be at home again!" taken as a whole, Baum's "Oz" series rejects traditional views of **[End Page 209]** the value of home (261). In fact, as the series progresses, Dorothy, herself, becomes an explorer who, along with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, eventually rejects her Kansas home and domestic life to join a community of homeless nonconformists. A close study of the first six Oz books—*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904), *Ozma of Oz* (1907), *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* (1908), *The Road to Oz* (1909), and *The Emerald City of Oz* (1910)—reveals that, unlike the motion picture, Baum does not believe that one's "heart's desire" is to be found in one's own backyard. Instead, his works validate Phyllis Bixler's assertion that in "Golden Age" books by male

authors, children "typically find their pastoral *locus amoenus*, or 'felicitous space,' at some distance from their homes . . ." (1).

On the surface, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the first in Baum's fourteen-book series, seems to support the MGM film's obsession with "home." After landing in Oz, Dorothy tells the grandmotherly Witch of the North (a separate character from Glinda), "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?" (25). 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" (44-45). As she continues her journey, she keeps trying to explain her home, Kansas, to individuals who have never heard of it. ". . . I'm sure it's somewhere," she tells one man (114).

The desire to return home prompts Dorothy to go on a quest to meet the Wizard, to seek out the Wicked Witch of the West in order to kill her, and to travel to the country of the Quadlings to find the sorceress, Glinda. When Dorothy has the opportunity to ask the Wizard to send...

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