Re-/deconstructing the Yellow Brick Road: 

Gender, Power and Tin Man

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Judy Garland’s Technicolor journey down the Yellow Brick Road is arguably one of the best loved and most watched films in cinema history. Its bright costumes and cheerful musical numbers still appeal to modern children, and many adults continue to watch and re-watch The Wizard of Oz (1939) with a sense of nostalgia. However, Sci Fi Channel mini-series Tin Man (2007) presents a darker, futuristic “Oz” story, which challenges the patriarchal assumptions of the perennially screened 1939 film. Relying on its audience’s knowledge of the earlier film, Tin Man illustrates how a text can subvert and parody the ideologies of its intertexts without deriding the texts themselves. Tin Man challenges patriarchal assumptions about gender, portraying a female hero who is strong, brave and assertive, but also embraces a more “feminine” style of leadership, rather than performing as a male hero “in drag.” While stories celebrating “brother bonds” abound, it is far more common for sisters—literal and figurative—to be pitted against one another, frequently in competition for a man, if they are present at all. Tin Man also subverts this trend, emphasising the empowering nature of sisterhood: the main drive of the narrative is for the protagonist to rediscover her superpowers by remembering her past, reconnecting with her long-lost sister and joining together to defeat the true villain of the “O.Z.” Through its relationship with The Wizard of Oz and
other narratives, *Tin Man* exposes and subverts their patriarchal underpinnings, while arguably avoiding alienating fans of the MGM film.

Since the publication of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900, the story widely regarded as an “American fairy tale” has been re-written, adapted for various media and altogether transformed to suit the different purposes of its creators. In the first decades after publication, stage and film adaptations abounded, some bearing very little resemblance to the text and gaining only modest popularity. Response to *The Wizard of Oz* film in 1939 was overwhelmingly positive, and on account of its almost annual television screenings across the globe, the film has arguably become the “definitive” Wizard of Oz story—“the first piece of the Baum Oz canon,” as Kevin Durand argues, effectively “supplanting” L. Frank Baum’s books because of its wider audience, and the fact that it is most people’s introduction to the story. Some adaptations have subverted the earlier texts, but few have gained popularity, notably until Gregory Maguire’s bestselling novel *Wicked* (1995), which was made into a highly successful musical in 2003.

Featuring a cowardly lion, a heartless tin man, an evil witch and a girl who is mysteriously transported by tornado to another realm, *Tin Man* clearly positions itself as a *Wizard of Oz* tale. Yet, despite the numerous intertextual references, *Tin Man* also clearly marks itself as a different story, one that acknowledges its heritage and stakes its claim as a modern text, ideologically as well as aesthetically. Nor is its subversion only on the surface, explicitly engaging with the patriarchal assumptions of *The Wizard of Oz* to create characters that break stereotypes and promote identifiably feminist ideas. It is important to note that the series’ creators insist that the series is based on Baum’s first “Oz” book (this is stated in the opening credits, and several times in the “behind the scenes” documentary), which is notably more feminist than the 1939 film. Nevertheless, as explained above, the MGM film’s iconic status means that it will be the point of reference for most viewers, and regardless of the filmmakers’ intentions, the series is therefore likely to be understood as responding to the film. Visual references to the film reinforce this, as I will discuss below.

Subversion through intertextuality can take many forms and achieve varying degrees of success, and in this paper I argue that the key to *Tin Man*’s success is in the way it positions itself in relation to its intertexts. There has been much debate over what constitutes a “successful” revisionist or reclaimed text, such as fairy tale, “quest” narratives or those that employ satire or parody. The *Shrek* franchise is a good example of a text that claims to be ideologically subversive, but fails to deliver on its
promise. As Maria Takolander and David McCooey argue, *Shrek* appears to be a revisionary text because of its intertextual and parodic references to fairy tales, its "carnivalesque" elements, as well as the portrayal of a heroine who is active, "ugly" and "portly." However, these elements are in fact only manipulated to reinforce patriarchal conceptions of gender, and "the transgressive 'look' of the film provides something of a ruse or a diversion." Even genuine attempts at subversive feminist fairy tales and quest narratives in the 1970s and 80s simply replaced male hero characters with female, as Lissa Paul argues, who therefore were "more like men tricked out in drag." Masculine characteristics were still valorised over feminine. Television series like *Xena: Warrior Princess* have been claimed and celebrated as "feminist camp," because they "convey a sense of ironic distance from gender stereotypes," drawing attention to their constructedness and thus portraying them as incredible. However, as Pamela Robertson concedes, feminist camp is unable to move beyond the paradigm of the stereotypes, as while "camp may appropriate and expose stereotypes... it also, in some measure, keeps them alive." As the example of *Shrek* illustrates, intertextuality and parody can as easily reinforce the patriarchal status quo as undermine it. I therefore argue that positioning itself in part as a "postmodern parody," paying homage to the earlier text and gently exposing its problematic gender ideologies, while promoting positive, alternative ways of being and acting as women and men, is an effective means for *Tin Man* to begin dismantling stereotypes and other gendered assumptions. As Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern parody "does not disregard the context of the past representations it cites, but uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated from that past today."* Tin Man* thus establishes its temporal distance from the MGM film and its ideologies, without positioning the 1939 film as an object of derision.

**The “Good Girl” and the Rebel: Dorothy and DG**

MGM's Dorothy is the quintessential feminine stereotype. She is physically and mentally weak, performing no more strenuous tasks than housework and walking, and is easily manipulated into returning home by Professor Marvel when she first runs away. She collects friends whom she can "help" along her journey, and endeavours to be passive and pleasing to everyone she meets (even killing the witches does not negate this, as both killings were accidental). Importantly, as Sydney Duncan puts it, "she accomplishes nothing in the film," because it turns out to have all been a dream. In short, Dorothy is a "good girl," who ultimately does nothing to
disturb the patriarchal order.

DG, Dorothy’s counterpart in Tin Man, subverts patriarchal expectations of feminine behaviour at every turn, and the series frequently draws attention to these expectations as it does so. The premise of Tin Man is that DG, who has grown up in Kansas, is transported to “the O.Z.” where she must find the magical Emerald of the Eclipse and prevent the witch Azkadellia from bringing total darkness to the land forever. The three episodes trace DG’s journey of self-(re-)discovery, as she finds out that she is born of the royal line in the O.Z., and Azkadellia is actually her sister possessed by a witch. Befriending Glitch (the Scarecrow), Cain (Tin Man) and Raw (Cowardly Lion) along the way, DG rediscovers the magical powers within herself, and through recovering her memories she is able to free her sister so that together they can save the O.Z. In contrast to Dorothy’s passivity, DG is an active agent. When she is caught and trapped in a cage by the “munchkin” characters, DG frees herself, despite the protests of her fellow male prisoner, Glitch (the “scarecrow”), that it is too dangerous.  

She is often shown as fearless, and has a sense of her own power to effect change, rushing in to defend a family from six armed soldiers while carrying only a stick. The violent scene turns out to be holographic, and DG therefore suffers no consequences, despite the fact that her likelihood of success would have been low, and thus her sense of empowerment is endorsed. At other times, DG states that she is “scared,” but still acts and succeeds despite her fear. In her life before the O.Z., DG is also positioned as mechanically minded and transgressive, as she fixes machinery around the farm and gets caught speeding on her motorbike in an early scene. Her characterisation thus determinedly breaks down gender binaries. Further, unlike Dorothy or Shrek’s Princess Fiona, DG does not relinquish these characteristics or her power in order to achieve a “happy ending.”

The introduction to the “Tin Man” character explicitly highlights how patriarchal assumptions about gender are flawed, using a character that epitomises hegemonic masculinity to do so. “Tin Man” is O.Z. slang for a male police officer, and Wyatt Cain carries both phallic gun and badge of (traditionally male) authority. He does not smile or show any kind of emotion, and initially refuses to show DG and Glitch the way to Central City, sneering, “Nothing personal, kid, but look at you. First sign of trouble, you’re just going to cut and run.” The use of “look” emphasises the fact that he is making a judgement based only on appearance. Incensed, DG retorts, “I’ve been tossed through a thunderstorm, trussed up by lawn gnomes, how bad can papeys be?” and proves her courage when faced with the carnivorous papey, illustrating how judging women based on
patriarchal assumptions is foolish. DG also angrily reminds Cain that he needed to be rescued, and was rescued, by the “kid” and the “zipper-head,” as he derisively calls DG and Glitch: “Nothing personal, but when we found you, you were in a tin box.” The repetition of “nothing personal” also emphasises Cain’s misguided reliance on generalisations: stereotypes, which highlights the reversal of gender roles.

The development of Cain’s character challenges hegemonic masculinity itself, as his journey is about reconnecting with his emotions and family, as represented by repeated references to “heart.” The frequent, parodic “heart” references evoke the literally “heartless” Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz*, and this intertextual connection to the original Tin Man’s ultimate goal emphasises how important it is for Cain to allow his emotions to guide his decisions. When Cain first decides to help DG, she asks, “Why the change of heart?” Cain replies, “Heart’s got nothing to do with it,” signalling his initial position as “heartless.” He is bent only on revenge for (he believes) the deaths of his family; however, he subsequently agrees to give this up in order to keep helping DG. When he finds out that his son Jeb is still alive, he endeavours to rekindle an emotional bond with him, and help Jeb rediscover his heart in turn. On discovering that Jeb is cold and ruthless as leader of the Resistance, Cain works to convince him of the importance of love and compassion. He tells Jeb, “If you haven’t got heart, you’ve got nothing,” and convinces him not to execute Zero, the man who killed Jeb’s mother. When the two men part, it is clear that they have reconciled—their hug appears to convey genuine affection on both sides, and Jeb’s final “Thank you” further indicates that he, too, accepts that “without heart, you’ve got nothing.”

The feminine domestic plays a significant role in both DG and Dorothy’s lives; however, while Dorothy can never escape domestic symbols and spaces, *Tin Man* draws attention to the oppressive nature of a wholly domestic role. Dorothy is surrounded by domestic symbols and inseparable from them; as Linda Rohrer Paige points out, Dorothy has an important psychological connection to her house, which she literally takes with her on her adventure. Her only two acts of potential power employ domestic symbols, killing one witch with the house, and killing the other with a bucket of water while trying to put out the scarecrow’s burning arm. Had Dorothy been using these items consciously, it could be viewed as subversive and empowering; however, vanquishing the witches is accomplished by accident, and Dorothy takes no real responsibility for doing so. She is not even angry with the witch. Dorothy is therefore merely using the tools prescribed by her society, and carefully avoiding
any real sense of transgression by committing violence only accidentally. Dorothy’s accidental slaughter of the witches can in fact be read as a kind of “natural justice” for women who reject traditional feminine roles. As Paige notes, the witches are not wives, nor mothers, nurturers or inspirers. The Wicked Witch of the West is cast as the antithesis of “good” domestic femininity by refusing to use her broom as a domestic tool, rather using it to gain freedom of movement rather than maintaining a home. The fact that the witches’ deaths were caused by domestic accidents implies that they deserved their fates, disguising the fact that it is social structures that actually enforce gendered behaviour.

DG, on the other hand, rejects domesticity—she does not need to take her house with her on her quest, and the life she wants to escape from is one where she has to work as a waitress. Through visual links to MGM’s Dorothy, Tin Man both confirms Dorothy’s role as a domestic one and simultaneously rejects it for contemporary women. DG’s work uniform is a parody of Dorothy’s everyday appearance: a blue and white checked apron, which she first appears in with her dark hair bunched on either side of her face. This domestic, service role—Dorothy’s role—is thus shown to be artifice, and inappropriate for the modern DG. She exclaims to her “parents”: “This isn’t my life… taking other people’s orders!” The fact she succeeds in escaping, attaining a position of power in the O.Z., provides further narrative endorsement.

The drive of The Wizard of Oz film is also to return to the domestic space and restore the patriarchal status quo, culminating in Dorothy’s declaration, “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.” This statement is particularly significant because it not only affirms that Dorothy’s (woman’s) place is in the home, but that there is nothing worth searching for outside it. While Tin Man culminates in DG’s similarly-themed declaration, “It’s so good to be home,” home for DG is the O.Z.—the land of her adventures—and it is neither associated with domesticity, nor a stronghold of patriarchy. When making this statement, she looks out over her vast, sunlit realm rather than inside a domestic space. The drive of the narrative is also to restore a matriarchal order to the O.Z., led by DG’s mother, the rightful ruler who has been imprisoned by witch-Azkadellia her daughter. Although this is the status quo for the O.Z., it presents a direct challenge to primary world norms, as represented by the MGM film.

Tin Man works to explicitly position The Wizard of Oz as a historical text, rejecting its patriarchal ideologies. The construction of gender in The Wizard of Oz deviates little from other inter-war patriarchal perceptions, as
while women’s capacity to enter the workforce could no longer be denied, domesticity was instead heavily promoted as natural for women, and more important for the “civilisation” of society, to encourage them to stay at home. However, the film’s continued position in the contemporary world reflects how deeply embedded the idealisation of domestic femininity remains. *Tin Man* confronts its supposed relevance head-on. Mid-way through the series, it is revealed that the ruling line in the O.Z. stretches back to the “original” Dorothy Gale, for whom DG was named. In a scene typical of postmodern parody, Dorothy appears, in her black-and-white Kansas farmyard, to present DG with a powerful jewel, the Emerald of the Eclipse. This act is thus one of matrilineal inheritance, direct from the *Wizard of Oz* character, which both acknowledges a debt that DG owes Dorothy, and simultaneously establishes that she is not Dorothy, as her name further shows. This scene can be read as paying homage to the earlier film, emphasising that Dorothy’s place within a patriarchy was in the past (in ironic black and white), whereas empowerment for DG (and contemporary women) takes place in the present and future.

The journeys of all characters in *Tin Man* show that the primary world status quo is not an ideal that should be restored. Kristin Noone argues that the characters of *Tin Man* (scarecrow Glitch, tin man Cain, lion Raw and DG) are “never shown fully reassimilated into even the newly liberated O.Z.,” and instead remain “liminal and Othered” unlike their counterparts in *The Wizard of Oz*. The MGM and Baum characters are marginalised at the beginning of the narrative, but find a secure place by the end once their differences have been erased. Noone provides a dystopian reading of *Tin Man*’s resolution, claiming that, instead, “*Tin Man* returns the heartaches and nightmares to Oz,” and that a happy homecoming “becomes a grotesque impossibility” for its heroes because of their hybrid status. However, I argue that the place of these characters is not as unstable and uncertain as Noone claims, and the “homecoming” is still a happy one for all the characters, despite the heartache. In fact, the happiness of the ending despite the absence of clear “places” for each character in the O.Z. challenges the idea that each person *should* have a designated “place” in society, determined by superficial characteristics. In *The Wizard of Oz*, all of the characters’ problems and differences are “fixed” by the end of the narrative; however, by refusing to resolve everything that made the characters marginal to O.Z. society, and allowing the characters a triumphal happy ending nevertheless, the series suggests that being different is no reason for anyone to be excluded, nor should differences determine one’s place in society. Thus the orderly status quo of *The Wizard of Oz* is destabilised.
Female Heroes or Men in Drag: Dorothy, DG and Power

Many feminists have critiqued empowered female narratives as simply portraying male heroes “in drag.” Lissa Paul argues that the “typical” archetypal quest narrative is about turning boys into men, and therefore does not apply to girls and women, who end up looking like a male hero “in drag” if they are simply fitted into the same quest pattern. Of course, an individual’s assumptions about what constitutes masculine—or “male” behaviour, as Paul sometimes terms it—will determine which characteristics would render a female hero a man in drag. To argue that a female character is “in drag” simply because she is physically powerful inscribes physical power as masculine. Nevertheless, simply reversing binary oppositions often reinforces patriarchal perceptions, by reifying stereotypically masculine characteristics (such as violence and aggression) at the expense of feminine ones (such as emotion and nurture). Further, if victory can only be achieved by being physically stronger, a position which is inaccessible to most women, then alternative forms of fighting and gaining power are invalidated, and masculine domination subtly reinforced. Anna E. Altman quotes a student who used the earthy phrase, “just another case of welding brass tits on the armour,” which evokes more clearly the erasure of female embodiment that such a text might perform. However, it also becomes necessary to negotiate possible essentialising—presuming a natural connection between femininity and female bodies, and masculinity and male bodies—and affirming difference. Tin Man validates “different” ways of performing a quest to masculine stereotypes: ways of fighting that do not rely on physical strength alone, and a leadership style that incorporates feminine attributes.

DG employs alternative means of defeating her enemies, which frequently do not require physical force. DG is not afraid to fight physically, and is willing to fight armed soldiers, so this form of fighting is not denied to women. However, the climactic battle of the series, against the witch, involves DG drawing on her inner strength (magic), and the focus of the scene is on staying strong and joining with her sister rather than dominating through force. One of the earliest times that DG uses her powers and gains authority involves no violence at all. Rather than harming the carnivorous papey, DG restores the trees that were originally the papey’s main source of food. The papey instantly transform from seemingly mindless hunters into grateful subjects, bending knee before (unknowst to DG) their rightful ruler and eating the tree’s fruit rather than DG and her companions.
It is also highly significant that DG must search within herself for the power to defeat the witch and free herself from a tomb, particularly when contrasted with Dorothy’s only access to power, as it constructs women as innately powerful. Although Paige argues that, in MGM’s version, “our heroine’s true search is for the power within herself, the power of the female imagination—that which patriarchy, the Wizard, denies women,”34 I argue that this reading of The Wizard of Oz identifies an unfulfilled potential, rather than an actual discovery of self. Where Dorothy quickly loses any power she gains, DG nurtures it, and thus accomplishes what Dorothy could not, drawing on her own memories and buried magical powers. Aside from her accidental domestic arsenal, Dorothy’s only other source of power is the witch’s magic slippers. Paige argues that the slippers represent “female imagination,” and represent “woman’s ‘inheritance’ from members of her own sex”;35 however, while Paige argues that this indicates Dorothy’s kinship with the witches, as Dorothy took the shoes without their previous owner’s permission, it is more a reminder that Dorothy has no power of her own. Moreover, she is completely oblivious to that power for almost the entire film, and while it could have granted her freedom, she chooses to use it only to return home. As well as being accidental, her defeat of the witches is incidental to her plans, and she is thus a severely disempowered protagonist, who is rewarded for giving up any hint of rebellion.

In direct contrast to Dorothy’s powerlessness, DG possesses incredibly strong magical powers, in addition to her physical courage and mechanical prowess. Again, the text draws on tropes from the MGM film to emphasise DG’s positive difference. While DG also initially possesses power she is unaware of, her quest involves gradually remembering the power she wielded as a child, and the more she learns about her abilities, the more she can accomplish. Unlike Dorothy’s stolen (illegitimate) power, DG’s power is a freely given, maternal inheritance, which she gains when the cyborg Father Vue impresses DG’s mother’s marking into her palm. Further, as Dorothy’s power derives from shoes, which are external to her, it is easily lost beyond recovery. DG’s power comes from within, and can thus never be taken away, only temporarily forgotten.

Despite being its youngest member, DG becomes the leader of the group, and showcases a “different” style of leadership that emphasises and validates emotional connections. Before they storm Azkadellia’s stronghold with the Resistance, DG is shown reassuring and encouraging Raw and Glitch, giving them confidence for the battle ahead. When she approaches Cain, the following exchange occurs:

Cain: I know what you’re doing. I’ve led men into battle myself.
DG: So, how am I doing?
Cain: There’s a lot less hugging when I do it, but not so bad.

This clearly establishes DG’s role as leader, and shows that while DG is doing something similar to Cain’s masculine “leading men into battle,” it is also significantly different. Cain’s response might seem patronising on the surface; however, it is in keeping with his distant manner, and he further validates DG’s approach by hugging her when she offers him a (masculine) handshake.

**Good Women, Bad Women: Good Bodies, Bad Bodies?**

Like Dorothy and the witches, DG and witch-Azkadellia are set up as doubles, divided by the common fantasy/science-fiction trope of “good” versus “evil,” which therefore delineates “good” and “bad” ways of being female.36 However, unlike *The Wizard of Oz*, *Tin Man* presents different ways of being a powerful female, rather than equating power with transgression and evil which must ultimately be punished.37 The series interacts with many other narratives about women, bodies and power and thus evokes an even richer intertextual tapestry. Here, although *Tin Man* destabilises some entrenched perceptions of female power and embodiment, it uncritically adopts other problematic assumptions about gender, particularly regarding sexuality.

**Bodies and Power**

The series introduces and destabilises many popular conceptions about female bodies and power that have deep historical roots. DG’s power is enacted through touch: through direct use of the female body. She has no need for an external magical object, such as a (phallic) magic wand or shoes, and thus the female body itself is inscribed as a site of power. It could be argued that this is problematic, given the long history of defining woman “as body,” as opposed to the male “mind,” and using this definition to justify denying women basic rights. Elizabeth Grosz reveals the integral role that Cartesian dualism has played in modern philosophical thought: Descartes’ insistence that there is “an unbridgeable gulf” between mind and body has informed centuries of thought.38 If woman is body, and man is mind, then woman cannot access rational thought, or power. Grosz further argues that, alternatively, the specificity of women’s bodies has been conceptualised as justifying a “natural inequality”—that is, “women’s corporeal specificity is used to explain and justify the different (read: unequal) social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes.”39
However, DG is never reduced to her body; while it is a source of power, it does not operate separately from her mind, and it is clear that, as a child, she had to learn how to use it, a sign of rationality which undermines the Cartesian construction. Toto, DG’s childhood magic tutor, and her father both encourage DG to remember what it felt like to use magic when she was a little girl, which unites mind and body.

Female bodies grant the ability to rule in the O.Z., and Azkadellia’s body (both witch and girl/woman) is also a source of magical power. The series thus suggests “good” and “bad” ways of using bodily power, rather than privileging mind over body, undermining the Cartesian construction. Male practitioners of magic, such as Raw (the cowardly lion) and other psychics (“viewers”), also rely on physical touch to enact their powers. Raw heals Cain’s wound by touching his leg, and all “viewers” can access another’s memories or thoughts through touch. This further undermines the gendered implications, showing both male and female magical practitioners relying on body-magic.

Jessica Zebrine Gray shows how Cartesian dualism and assumptions about gender and magic found in the influential treatise on witches, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (published c. 1486), reinforce each other in developing the typical image of a witch, which has informed the representation of “Wizard of Oz” witches. Tin Man’s engagement with these assumptions further destabilises binaries that essentialise gender stereotypes. According to *The Malleus Maleficarum*, “women are more inclined to approach magic physically while men are more intellectual in their practice. … [F]emale submission is shown through the witch’s willingness to allow her familiar, usually an animal, to touch or suck blood from her body.” This association of powerful (evil) women with not only their bodies, but also inextricably with the debasement of those bodies, both reinforces the association of woman with body and diminishes her as a result. Tin Man portrays an even closer association of the witch character with her familiar: witch-Azkadellia’s winged monkeys, when not running errands for her, reside in tattoos across her chest and back, and are thus literally embodied in the witch figure. However, witch-Azkadellia’s relationship to her familiars is one of dominance and companionship, thus destabilising the link between female bodily power and submission. Nor is a bodily association with animals exclusively linked to evil, or to women: Raw and the other viewers are lion-human hybrids, and Toto is a shapeshifter who can turn himself into a dog at will. This ability proves essential to his role in the quest, as he is able to distract guards in dog-form and travel more quickly, to places he could not otherwise access.

However, witch-Azkadellia’s “bad” powers reinforce patriarchal
anxieties about female sexuality, which is particularly problematic given DG’s lack of sexual expression in the series. Witch-Azkadellia’s preferred method of killing involves sucking the soul out of her always-male victim’s mouth, after which the camera zooms in on her heaving bosom and expression of ecstasy. The effect is of post-coital satisfaction, therefore coding the killings as a sexual act and witch-Azkadellia as a literal “man-eater,” who has a dangerous sexual voracity that resonates with the witch of Malleus Maleficarum: “For the sake of fulfilling the mouth of the womb, [witches] consort even with the devil.” The figure of the man-eater, as Susan Bordo argues, has strong cultural resonance, and witch-Azkadellia represents the imagined (patriarchal) fear that “the sexual act, when initiated and desired by a woman, is … itself an act of eating, of incorporation and destruction of the object of desire.” With no positive counter in DG, the sexualised representation of witch-Azkadellia thus reinforces this fear and subtly implies that women should be sexually passive or abstain. The series is also heteronormative, as Azkadellia’s sexual murders are exclusively heterosexual, and the only (implied) sexual relationships are between heterosexual couples who produce children, or the pimp de Milo, who travels with only female prostitutes. Nevertheless, despite its problematic representations of sexuality, Tin Man succeeds in undermining some entrenched gendered assumptions about bodies and power.

Central to Tin Man is the importance of family—particularly the sister bond between DG and Azkadellia—and its interaction with the MGM film highlights how these bonds are denied or broken in a patriarchy. The Wizard of Oz uncritically sets women up to oppose each other, charging Dorothy with disposing of both anti-patriarchal witches. She is isolated from any female peers, and the “good” witches encourage Dorothy to look to the male Wizard as a source of authority, rather than joining together and helping each other. By transforming and challenging the assumptions behind this, Tin Man presents a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes a successful and happy ending, one that emphasises female bonding. The pitting of Azkadellia against DG—literally sister against sister —can in fact be read as a critique of the power struggles and animosity between women who are fighting against patriarchal structures and assumptions, whether or not they are aware of it. As Paige writes: “On a symbolic level, women traditionally have been blinded, divided by
patriarchy and unable to recognize their ‘sisters’, viewing one another as adversaries. … [T]hey also have sought to destroy other women as seeming enemies." While possessed by the witch, Azkadellia repeatedly attempts to kill DG—a powerful woman attempting to destroy a potential rival. Animosity between powerful sisters, represented as literal murder, is shown to be a misinterpretation, as Azkadellia’s first attempt is in response to a prophecy (whose origins are unclear):

The majestic Queen of the O.Z.
Had two lovely daughters she
One to darkness, she be drawn
One to light, she be shown
Double eclipse, it is foreseen
Light meets dark in the stillness between
But only one, and one alone,
Can hold the Emerald and take the throne

Young Azkadellia, controlled by the witch, recites the poem as she smothers her sister, repeating “only one, and one alone” as she holds a pillow over DG’s face. Yet it becomes clear that Azkadellia has misinterpreted the rhyme as it was neither necessary nor constructive for her to view DG as a rival to be eliminated. The series’ treatment of this attempted murder thus critiques fighting amongst women in their quests for power.

The climax and resolution show an alternative, preferable option to attempting to destroy other powerful women in a quest for personal, individual power (one alone). *Tin Man* shows sisterly solidarity and collective power as the imperative. Duncan claims that the resolution disempowers DG because she “must lean on her older sister for help”; however, it is clear that the message is about gaining power and strength through uniting with another woman, rather than implying “lack” on DG’s part. When attempting to drive the witch out of Azkadellia, DG echoes her sister’s words when they faced dangers as children: “Hold my hand, nothing can hurt us if we’re together.” Although each sister has individual power, it is their combined strength that overcomes the witch. Duncan also criticises the ambiguity of DG’s ultimate place in the O.Z., once the witch has been defeated and order restored:

It is unclear where DG will fit in the Outer Zone and how much power she will wield, since she comes back under the rule of her parents and into a position as younger sibling. Her future likely will not be in her own hands, and despite her gifts of magic, she may be the most powerless Dorothy of all.
However, this position confuses political power with other types of power, as it implies that unless she rules the O.Z., DG will be powerless. The series seems to suggest that this kind of political power is in fact unimportant. Although Azkadellia is wearing the Emerald when the witch is defeated, when the women return to their parents it is nowhere to be seen, which throws open the question of which one will “hold the Emerald and take the throne.” Before Azkadellia is rescued from the witch, it is even implied that DG might inherit, as black-and-white Dorothy presents her with the Emerald. Who ultimately rules the O.Z. matters less than how it is ruled, and, unlike Dorothy, no-one can take away DG’s power as it comes from within her. Further, she is an adult (and thus not subject to her parents), and an independent woman who has worked for a living; there is no suggestion that her family will suddenly attempt to dominate and disempower DG, particularly as dominating others is a sign of ultimate evil throughout the series. As DG tells Cain: “What’s really important is family.”

No Longer Innocent: The Woman and the Child

DG’s age, in comparison to Dorothy’s, is highly significant, as, traditionally, girls are allowed more freedom from gender norms as long as they give up those freedoms prior to reaching adulthood. Duncan argues that making DG an adult rather than a child “diminishes” her, celebrating the fact that, for Baum’s Dorothy, being a child is “sublimely sufficient” for her heroism.49 However, Baum’s work does nothing to undermine the historical construction of childhood that permits girls to be rebellious “tomboys” when young, but demands that they become proper, feminine adults before reaching adulthood. Michelle Ann Abate cites numerous examples of American literary girls who were subjected to “tomboy taming” and “expected to slough off tomboyish traits when they reached a specific age or stage of life.”50 Abate quotes Sharon O’Brien, arguing that “tomboy” behaviour “is frequently cast as ‘a very common phase through which little girls would pass on the way to the safe harbor of domestic femininity.’”51 This is not to say that portraying young girls as independent and adventurous is problematic in itself, only that positioning an adult character in a “Dorothy role” only adds to its subversive impact.

DG explicitly asserts her adulthood, and her right to transgress gender norms despite no longer being a child. Although an adult of “20 annuals,” DG must fight constant infantilisation by those around her. While still in Kansas, she has to tell her “parents,” “I’m not a little girl anymore”; Cain frequently calls her “kid” or “kiddo,” and witch-Azkadellia calls her “my baby sister” or “little sister.” However, she is ultimately acknowledged as
an adult by other characters: her “father” acknowledges her right to direct her own life, recognising her as a “young woman” and telling her “there’s a place and a time when we learn where we’re supposed to be, and you’re almost there”; Cain also affirms her role as leader of the group. At the climax of the series, when DG is holding out her hand to Azkadellia, the two women appear as the children they were before meeting the witch; DG apologises to Azkadellia, who says that she is scared, but takes DG’s hand anyway. When she escapes the witch, both resume their adult forms, symbolising letting go their childhoods and establishing themselves as adults, who do not renounce adventure or power.

By positioning DG as an adult with a dark past, the construction of children (particularly girls) as innocent is also challenged. In the second instalment of the series, DG finally remembers how the witch possessed her sister. Despite Azkadellia’s entreaties not to let go of her hand and that they could defeat the witch together, DG ran, leaving Azkadellia alone to be taken over by the evil Witch of the Dark. Although DG was a child at the time, her actions had devastating consequences, which her adult quest must undo and atone for: the witch possessed her sister and forced Azkadellia to commit murder and other crimes, their mother had to give up her magical powers to save DG from Azkadellia, and 15 years of corruption and violence marked the O.Z. Thus the trope of girlhood innocence is radically undermined, as adult DG takes responsibility for her actions, righting the wrongs of her past by standing with her sister and refusing to run away ever again.

**Conclusion: Rewriting the Canon**

*Tin Man* thus provides an example of how a text can explicitly draw on its intertexts in order to both undermine patriarchal assumptions and promote alternative ways of performing gender. By paying homage to the popular yet patriarchal *Wizard of Oz*, *Tin Man* avoids (automatically) alienating those who still love the old film, pointing out its flaws as belonging to the past and proposing an alternative path for the future. Challenging gender stereotypes, patriarchal conceptions of women’s bodies and abilities, power struggles between women, and constructions of girlhood, *Tin Man* provides a subversive reworking of its ancestor. Although problematically upholding heteronormativity and pathologising active female sexuality, *Tin Man* is primarily ideologically progressive, enabled by its intertextual relationships with past witches and wizards of Oz.

The continuing popularity of “Wizard of Oz” stories ensures that more retellings will continue to be produced. As actor Zooey Deschanel (DG)
says on a “behind the scenes” special feature, it is important that adaptations of such a well-known, iconic story “totally reinvent it.” It seems significant that the most recent adaptations, *Tin Man* (2007), *Wicked* (1995 novel; 2003 musical) and *The Witches of Oz* (2011), offer (at least somewhat) more empowered roles to women. *Wicked* sympathetically portrays Elphaba, otherwise known as the Wicked Witch of the West, as a powerful woman denounced and defamed by patriarchy, and in *The Witches of Oz*, Dorothy not only retains her magic slippers into adulthood, but gains additional powers, such as creating a flying bubble around the taxi she is in, and sending a cloud of butterflies to defeat the witch. *The Witches of Oz* is only somewhat progressive, as female power is portrayed as less than male power: Dorothy is only able to take on the witch once the wizard has divested her of the all-powerful Word of Change. It is also significant that these heavily intertextual revisionist texts target an older audience who is already familiar with the “Wizard of Oz” stories, and thus the 1939 MGM film retains its place as “the” children’s version. Arguably, intertextual feminist revisionings are most satisfying to those who already perceive problems with the intertexts, as they provide a cathartic resolution. However, they still rely on the audience accepting the patriarchal version(s) to some degree. Perhaps the most subversive way to re-imagine Oz would address younger children, and present a viable alternative to MGM’s beloved monolith. Such a text could potentially supplant *The Wizard of Oz* as “the first piece of the Baum canon,” just as *The Wizard of Oz* supplanted Baum himself long ago.

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NOTES


3 See for example Agnes B. Curry and Josef Velazquez, “Dorothy and Cinderella: The Case of the Missing Prince and the Despair of the Fairy Tale,” in *The
Re-/deconstructing the Yellow Brick Road

Universe of Oz: Essays on Baum’s Series and Its Progeny (Jefferson: MacFarland, 2010), ed. Kevin K. Durand and Mary K. Leigh, Kindle edition. This is also mentioned in the ‘behind the scenes’ documentary on the Tin Man DVD.


Although as Kevin Durand argues in the preface to The Universe of Oz ‘Blaxploitation’ film The Wiz (1978) enabled discussions around race, the film was considered a commercial and critical failure, losing millions of dollars and attracting widespread criticism. Ibid. The Witches of Oz television mini-series (2011) also updates The Wizard of Oz, and portrays a somewhat more empowered Dorothy, who more fully explores the power of her magic shoes. However, this subversion has limitations, and poor acting, special effects and production values, which have been widely criticised, as well as a frequently implausible and inconsistent plot, detract from its potentially subversive impact.

As Kirstin Noone notes, it can be more readily classified as science fiction rather than fantasy, unlike most other Wizard of Oz stories. Kristin Noone, “No Place Like the O.Z.: Heroes and Hybridity in Sci-Fi’s Tin Man,” in Durand and Leigh, The Universe of Oz.


It is worth noting at this point that The Wizard of Oz, like Baum’s novel and Shrek, is aimed at children, whereas Tin Man is aimed at a more adult audience, assumed to have knowledge of the earlier text(s), which is what enables its mode of subversion. However, while drawing conclusions from this difference might be tempting, to do so risks placing limits on the possibility for children’s texts to subvert gender norms. Children’s and young adult texts can be subversive, such as Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games series, now a feature film, and it is no more likely for adult texts to successfully subvert patriarchy, even when they attempt it. See for example Jessica Miller, “Katniss and the Politics of Gender,” in The Hunger Games and Philosophy: A Critique of Pure Treason, ed. George A Dunn and Nicolas Michaud (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012): 145–59.


I use the term principally in the sense Linda Hutcheon uses it—without (necessarily) ridiculing or mocking a text—to elucidate the relationship between Tin Man and previous “Wizard of Oz” narratives, although I do not claim that Tin Man’s “project” is to critique the process of representation. Michael Cunningham’s The Hours can be said to parody Mrs. Dalloway in a similar way. See Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 90–1.

Ibid., 90.

As so many directors worked on the film at different stages, it has become conventional to refer to the film by its production company. References to “Dorothy” throughout this article are to the MGM character, unless otherwise stated.

Duncan, “Lost Girl,” 55. This is not the case in Baum’s novel.

It is somewhat problematic that Glitch, as a queer character played by a well-known bisexual actor, initially seems one of the most disempowered in the series; however, his lack of identity and vagueness are clearly attributed to the wrong done him by Azkadellia: the theft of his brain. Glitch also fights when necessary, later taking on a group of soldiers with Cain. Cain is both surprised and impressed with Glitch’s abilities.

As Takolander and McCooey note, in her “true form” Fiona is “matronly, teary-eyed … hand-wringing and … looks almost bovine in her docility.” See Takolander and McCooey, “You Can’t Say No to Beauty and the Beast,” 7. Baum’s Dorothy, on the other hand, maintains her sense of adventure and fearlessness throughout his series of fourteen books (she plays only a minor role in many of them), and is never required to give up her independence.

Kristin Noone interprets this parting as meaning that Cain has chosen DG ahead of his son, who cannot be reformed from his ruthless ways; however, Jeb’s parting statement, as the two men hug, indicates that they intend to meet up when their tasks are complete: “Gods willing, I’ll see you at the tower then.” The contrast between this hug, and Jeb’s resistance when they first reunite, also signals a change in Jeb. See Noone, “No Place Like the O.Z.”


In Baum’s novel, she is mopping the floor, enslaved and forced to do housework, and throws the mop water in anger; nevertheless, she still does not intentionally kill the witch.


They appear to be her parents at this point in the narrative, but are later revealed to be “nurture units,” robots programmed to love and care for her.

It should be noted that, by the sixth book in Baum’s “Oz” series, The Emerald City of Oz, Dorothy has settled into Oz, and calls it “home,” indicating progression, rather than continual restoration of the status quo. However, the key point of subversion recognisable to most viewers here is the transformation of the concept of “return.”
Kristin Noone uses “The Witch” to distinguish witch-possessed Azkadellia from the girl/woman herself, seen in flashback. However, particularly as Azkadellia has already been possessed in some of the flashbacks, I will refer to her as “witch-Azkadellia,” using “Azkadellia” to distinguish DG’s unpossessed sister. See Noone, “No Place Like the O.Z.”

Sydney Duncan implies that Tin Man is part of a trend to “diminish” Dorothy, partly by “removing her name” (Duncan, “Lost Girl,” 56). However, the fact that DG’s father states that she was named after the original Dorothy, and the presence of black-and-white Dorothy Gale in the series, clearly marks DG as a different character.

Noone, “No Place Like the O.Z.”

Indeed, Noone’s interpretation of Cain as having “given up his family” to aid DG omits several key events, and it is strongly implied that the two will reunite after the witch is defeated. Noone claims that Cain turns his back on his son Jeb because Jeb “has become a brutal fighter, killing without mercy.” However, as the father and son part, it is clear that this is only intended to be temporary—Jeb says, “Gods willing, I’ll see you at the tower then,” and the two men hug, as noted above.

Noone, “No Place Like the O.Z.”


It should be noted that the series complicates these categories to a degree, as DG is responsible for the initial downfall of the O.Z., and Azkadellia is actually a victim of the witch.

Baum’s series does present alternative models of female power—for example, Princess Ozma is discovered to be the rightful ruler of Oz after the Scarecrow is deposed, and rules successfully throughout the series. However, some of these characters also embody “bad” ways of being powerful and female, such as Princess Langwidere (Ozma of Oz), who is portrayed as so vain and frivolous that she begrudges taking 10 minutes out of her day of self-admiration to rule the country. Langwidere is happy to give up her throne when the rightful (male) ruler returns.


41 Ibid.

42 It is quite different when young Azkadellia kills DG: Azkadellia’s reaction is minimal, and she holds out her hands to summon the life out of DG rather than sucking it into her mouth.


44 Ibid., 117.

45 As noted above, Glitch is queered through his camp mannerisms and the bisexual orientation of the actor who plays him. However, even he mentions attraction to women, never men, reaffirming heterosexuality as the norm.

46 Paige, “Wearing the Red Shoes,” 151. Although *Tin Man* transposes this into the matriarchal O.Z., divorcing it from its patriarchal origins, and positioning a female figure as responsible for causing the animosity (the witch), its message of sisterly solidarity remains.


48 Ibid., 65.


50 Michelle Ann Abate, *Tom-boys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: University of California Press, 2008), xix. This is also the case cross-culturally; for a discussion of 19th century Australian literature, see Jane McGennisken, “‘A Little Child Shall Lead Them’: Tasmanian and Victorian School Readers and National Growth,” *Papers: Explorations into Children’s Literature* 18, no. 1 (2008): 8–10. McGennisken also argues that death is a common way to deal with an “unruly” girl-character, such as Judy in *Seven Little Australians*.

51 Abate, *Tom-boys*, xix.


53 Durand, “Emerald Canon.”