

Wizard of oz essay sample



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The Wizard of Oz (1939) uses both mise en scène and sound to create an immense sequence of dream imagery, particularly in the second to last scene where Dorothy is at the point of going back to Kansas. This scene is distinctly significant in terms of mise en scène and sound as it concludes the film and highlights the themes that have been revealed throughout, giving a clearer message to the film's audience. The mise en scène is used to describe what is in the frame and why it is there. The scene near the end of the film where Dorothy is saying goodbye to the fantasy characters before leaving to go home in a hot air balloon is particularly significant in terms of mise en scène. The setting consists of bright colours in the Land of Oz which contrast against the dull colours used in the following sequence when Dorothy arrives back home. The juxtaposition of the contrasting colours depicts the differences between reality and fantasy. The director is trying to show that although reality may seem dull, 'there is no place like home,' therefore its purpose contributes to the viewers' understanding. The Wizard of Oz is well known for its range of tonalities. The director contrasts both the black and white sepia effect with the use of the three strip Technicolor process in order to show that the fantasy world is more appealing than the real world.

The image uses high exposure and high colour contrast once Dorothy steps into the Land of Oz, which contrasts against the dull black and white effect of the first sequence at the farm. The colours stand out more than before, which creates a much sharper and brighter image. The black and white effect is repeated again in the very last scene once Dorothy is home, highlighting the difference once again. David Bordwell suggests that viewers

judge the *mise en scène* of a film by standards of realism. (Bordwell, 2008, p. 113) The setting of Oz is constructed as a magical dream land, and therefore audiences will not expect a realistic setting. However, the film uses conventions of fantasy such as talking animals and witches, so that viewers can understand it in terms of its function, which is Dorothy's dream world. It then becomes real in the sense of how a viewer might imagine the situation. In this scene the position of the camera is initially an establishing shot of the crowd, allowing the viewer to visualise the setting and understand the situation more thoroughly.

The pro-filmic space then lessens to a medium close up of Dorothy and the wizard in the hot air balloon. There is a clear rule of thirds in the composition of the shot, which draws the viewers' attention to the subjects, and makes the audience focus on their speech. There is a shallow depth of field as Dorothy says goodbye to the other characters, which effectively draws focus onto the main characters in the scene, giving the viewers a more intimate view of the situation by blurring out the background. Dorothy leads the camera as she walks over to each character, so the camera follows along behind and gives a greater understanding of her character. This also allows the audience to notice the characters' facial expressions more carefully, and understand the emotions they are trying to portray at that particular moment. Another element which contributes to the *mise en scène* is the costumes. Dorothy emits a stereotypically young, innocent vibe within her character, as she has a very young complexion, with small blue ribbons at the end of her pigtails.

The costumes of the lion, scarecrow and tin man also contribute to the mise en scène, in that they are made to look like real people as opposed to a graphically real fiction character. In this scene, the recurring motif of the ruby slippers is a major part of the costume throughout the story, as they signify something more than just an item of clothing. The use of the ruby slipper motif in this scene is significant to the implicit theme of self-belief throughout the film. The scarecrow, tin man and lion are all searching for something that they think they need magical powers to gain, when in fact they just need to believe that they have them. This scene shows that Dorothy could have gone home if she believed in herself and realised what she wanted. Sound within a film is divided into three categories; speech, music and noise. This scene begins with diegetic sound in the form of the cheering crowd, accompanied by the non-diegetic cheerful music which relates rhythmically to the scene and gives the audience the impression that it will now be a happy ending.

The music is an example of a sound motif throughout the film, in that the tune ‘ Merry Old Land of Oz’ has previously been featured in another scene. It was played during the scene where Dorothy is taken to see the wizard, therefore similarly to this scene, the music is hopeful that something good is going to happen. The tune is played in a slightly higher pitch which adds to the cheerful vibe. The director has included a sound bridge to carry the audience into the next scene. The tune from the next scene begins to play while the image is still lingering on the previous scene. The music then changes to a more solemn tune to signify the change in mood, which helps to emotionally condition the audience. ‘ Sound doesn’t have to be in-your-

face, traditional, big sound effects. You can especially say a lot about the film with ambiences – the sounds for things you don't see.' (Bordwell, 2008) The music throughout this film adds to the ambience of the story, and follows the conventions of a family fantasy film. There is often music in the background of the scenes creating a specific mood or tone, as opposed to the use of sound effects. This scene is set in ' Emerald City' and so the setting is largely made up of green objects and scenery. The colour green is often associated with the idea of growth, which could relate to one of the themes throughout the film of growing up.

The implicit meaning of the film could be that Dorothy is progressing into adulthood and therefore must escape her child like fantasies and face her reality. The dream could symbolise her final fix of immaturity which evokes a sense of appreciation of her family and life at home. It shows Dorothy following the yellow brick road to maturity and avoiding any child-like rebellion that is previously shown at the beginning of the film when Dorothy attempts to run away and disobey her aunt and uncle. The fact that she meets three characters in this dream, who are searching for a brain, a heart, and courage, suggest that Dorothy is trying to find herself, and develop her own characteristics as she grows up. Another implicit meaning could be the idea of escapism.

Dorothy's dream world has been conjured up due to her desire to run away from reality, when in actual fact her fantasy world mirrors her real world in many aspects, such as the characters, which shows that she did not want to run away at all. In this scene, Dorothy is about to return home when her dog escapes from her grasp which causes a temporary problem for her. When the

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hot air balloon begins to fly away Dorothy then realises that she does not want to escape reality, but return to it. All of the elements within the mise en scène of a film contribute to the audience's understanding of the narrative. For a fantasy fiction film this is particularly important to be able to communicate a theme through the use of setting, costume and lighting. Although the story might not be realistic, it is real in the sense of being fiction, and therefore must be coherent to an audience.