

“There’s No Place Like Home”: Tonal Closure and Design in *The Wizard of Oz*

Ronald Rodman

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot¹

The goal and the course to the goal are primary. Content comes afterward: without a goal there can be no content.

In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and in short, retardations of all kinds. Therein lies the source of all artistic delaying, from which the creative mind can derive content that is ever new.

Heinrich Schenker²

And I remember that some of it wasn’t very nice . . . but most of it was beautiful. But just the same, all I kept saying to everybody was, “I want to go home!”

Dorothy (*The Wizard of Oz*)

¹Excerpt from “Little Gidding,” in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1943).

²*Free Composition* (New York and London: Longman, 1979), 5.

I. Introduction

In this volume dedicated to film music, David Neumeyer raises important issues of musical structure and tonal design in narrative films, topics that I raise elsewhere (as he notes).³ Neumeyer presents a compelling and elegant argument for a double-tonic complex in Bernard Herrmann's score to *The Trouble With Harry*, while also setting forth a general theory of tonal design in film. Beginning with Schenkerian analysis and moving on to the Greimasian "semiotic square," Neumeyer theorizes that the tendency for a film to exhibit a coherent musical structure is a complex issue, dependent on many variables, such as the music's relationship to a film's narrative, the amount of music (or lack thereof) in a film, and the tendency for a particular composer to set forth ordered key relations in a film. Neumeyer uses a "slider" analogy (familiar to all Macintosh computer users) to suggest that tonal function in a narrative film is not an "absolute" property as it is in common-practice-era symphonic music. Instead, he argues that film scores may possess coherent tonal functions to greater or lesser degrees and may "slide" through a continuum from traditional tonal functions on the left to ambiguous or attenuated functions on the right.

Neumeyer's overarching concern is whether or not the composer (e.g., Herrmann) creates a film score with a coherent tonal design in mind. He begins his article by citing obstacles to coherent structuralist/formalist descriptions of music in film and goes on to state that teleological tonal plans such as those I have found in Herbert Stothart's film musicals are rare. However, he subsequently argues that it is possible for the composer to create a score with a premeditated tonal design, given the mode of production for the Hollywood film industry. Neumeyer then concludes the article by echoing Royal Brown's concern that we must know the composer's intent before proceeding with an analysis of a film's tonal design. Neumeyer's concern that film music analysis be composer-driven, or "poietic," is brought out in his conclusion:

³David Neumeyer, "Tonal Design and Narrative in Film Music: Bernard Herrmann's *A Portrait of Hitch* and *The Trouble With Harry*," *Indiana Theory Review* 19 (1998): 87–123. Also, Ronald Rodman, "Tonal Design and the Aesthetic of Pastiche in Herbert Stothart's *Maytime*," in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

"Tonality in film music has links to symbolic or dramatic schemes in nineteenth-century stage and symphony, but, without external evidence, readings lack the security of the assumption that such practices are relevant to any specific film. . . . At its worst, reading tonal design may produce false conclusions about something that isn't there. At its best, however, it can integrate some modes of reading concert music securely into the interpretive practices of cinema scholarship."⁴

Neumeyer's concern with a poietic analytical perspective raises the recurrent question of the purpose of analysis. Is the sole purpose of analysis to recreate the composer's intention in a musical work, or should it focus on what the listener discerns? The attempt to "get inside the composer's mind" dominated musical analysis in the middle of the twentieth century; this situation was perhaps a result of reaction to much slipshod analysis at the century's beginning. As enlightening and valuable as much of this poietic analysis has proven, other late twentieth-century analyses and criticisms have viewed the musical text from an esthetic vantage point: that is, from the point of view of the listener. Such a listener-oriented perspective includes attempts to align music analysis with recent movements in literary theory (e.g., postmodernism, poststructuralism, Marxism, semiotics, and feminism). While the quality of much of this analysis has been difficult to evaluate, there can be no doubt that esthetic interpretations of musical works have led to interesting new perspectives and even insights into what musical works mean to listeners grounded in modern culture. Often, such analyses reveal more about culture and perceptions of culture than of the musical artifact itself. Do such listener-oriented analyses reveal aspects of musical structure and affect that the composer may have missed? If so, perhaps such analyses (such as those that discover tonal designs in film music) will broaden our conceptions of what musical analysis can do, both as we apply an analysis to a musical system or to culture at large.

In this article, I present a reading of a tonal design in Herbert Stothart's score for *The Wizard of Oz*. In doing so, I am not so much concerned with Stothart's *intent* in creating the design (though I would argue that, as the "music adapter" for the film's score, he was able to create a tonal design in that score) as I am with showing how the resultant tonal design conforms to the primary theme of the film. Based on analyses of his earlier films and on his written commentary in books and newspaper articles, it is apparent that

⁴Neumeyer, "Tonal Design and Narrative in Film Music," 123.

Stothart was concerned with tonal and formal structure in films.⁵ However, production of *The Wizard of Oz* was so fragmented—from writers to directors to actors to music composers and arrangers—that an effective poetic or producerly reading is nearly impossible. The film must thus be “read” by the viewer for it to make sense. The necessity of an esthetic analysis does not lie solely in the realm of the film’s music, however. The film has become one of the rare American cultural artifacts in which esthetic readings have revealed a masterwork greater than the sum of its parts. Thus, while I am not ready to accept the “death of the author” that Barthes suggests for postmodern analysis, I am willing to grant the listener/analyst more credence in reading a film’s tonal design than Neumeyer is willing to allow.⁶

II. The Production of “*The Wizard of Oz*”

MGM studios decided to produce an adaptation of L. Frank Baum’s children’s story, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, in 1938, determined to make a prestigious fantasy picture to rival Disney’s *Snow White*, which had premiered the year before. MGM lavished \$3,700,000 on the production, hoping to break even but not expecting to make a profit. In fact, the film did not turn a profit for nearly twenty years, and then did so only after the rights to the film were sold to CBS for television broadcast. Critical acclaim for the film was initially mixed, yet by the mid-1970s the film had become firmly established in both scholarly and unscholarly American cultural discourse.⁷

Despite the light-hearted tenor of the narrative in *The Wizard*, production of the film met many difficulties. Writers, actors, even directors were hired, then fired. The screenplay is a piecemeal and loose adaptation of Baum’s book, with bits contributed by Herman Mankiewicz, Noel Langley (who contributed most of the material of the final version of the screenplay), Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf. Several cast changes also

⁵In particular, see Herbert Stothart, “Film Music,” in *Behind the Screen: How Films are Made*, ed. Stephen Watts (New York: Dodge, 1938), 139–44.

⁶For Roland Barthes’s extreme view on readerly texts, see his “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 142–48.

⁷An excellent resource for the inside story on the production of the film is Aljean Harmetz’s *The Making of “The Wizard of Oz”* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). Some of the reviews of the premier of the film are quoted on pages 21–23.

disrupted the filming. When MGM began preparing for filming, the studio hoped to borrow Shirley Temple from Twentieth Century Fox. Fox refused to release the moppet, and MGM went with Judy Garland, who had played several small roles with the studio prior to 1938. Wallace Beery, Ed Wynn, and W.C. Fields were all considered to play the part of the Wizard, but the part ultimately went to Frank Morgan, who did yeoman's duty on the film and played the roles of Professor Marvel, The Doorman of Emerald City, the Carriage Driver and the Guard of Oz's palace. The role of the Wicked Witch of the West was to be played first by Edna May Oliver, then Gale Sondergaard (a Hollywood beauty, in which case the witch would have been portrayed as a beautiful "fallen woman" figure), until finally Margaret Hamilton was chosen. Early drafts of the project also had roles for Fanny Brice (a witch), Betty Jaynes (a princess), and Kenny Baker (a prince), but these parts were deleted before filming began. Finally, Buddy Ebsen was to play the scarecrow, but at Ray Bolger's insistence (he was to play the Tin Man) the roles were reversed. During early filming, Ebsen developed an extreme respiratory infection from the aluminum dust on his costume and had to be hospitalized. Subsequently, Ebsen was fired for his inability to work, and Jack Haley was chosen to take Ebsen's place.

Other problems hampered production of the film. The antics of "Singer's Midgets," who played the Munchkins, are legendary, though exaggerated.⁸ Four directors were used, though only Victor Fleming received credit. Richard Thorpe began the production, but was fired after two weeks for unspecified reasons. George Cukor worked on the film for three days and was reassigned to another film. Then came Fleming, who directed the bulk of the film but left early to direct *Gone with the Wind* for David Selznick. King Vidor finished the direction of the film, working a mere ten days but directing the important "Over the Rainbow" scene with Judy Garland.

Like the screenplay, the musical score of *The Wizard* was composed by committee. Herbert Stothart, the head music director at MGM, served as "Music Director and Adapter" for the film and ultimately won the 1939 Oscar for his efforts. The musical score was to revolve around songs composed for the film by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg. Arthur Freed, a musician and composer of early film musicals, served as an associate producer and monitored the musical score carefully. Stothart's duties were to incorporate Arlen and Harburg's songs into the narrative and provide other

⁸Harmetz, 188-204.

music, both diegetic and nondiegetic. Stothart was assisted by George Bassman, Murray Cutter, Paul Marquardt, and Ken Darby, all of whom orchestrated much of Stothart's score and also contributed some original music.⁹

Most critiques of the film foreground the beauty and expertise of the Arlen and Harburg songs while consigning Stothart to the role of an artisan who merely "filled in" the musical gaps. Harnetz unfairly degrades Stothart's role in the film to make a point on the plight of songwriters in the 1930s:

When *The Wizard of Oz* won Herbert Stothart an Academy Award for Best Original Score, the award was really aimed at the forty minutes of songs—"Over the Rainbow," "If I Were King of the Forest," "Ding Dong, the Witch is Dead," "We're Off to See the Wizard," "If I Only Had a Brain"—all written by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg. That Stothart, who *merely* composed the incidental music that bridged the songs, picked up the gold statue was typical of the macabre jokes Hollywood played on songwriters during the 1930s.¹⁰

As I have pointed out elsewhere, Stothart did not *merely* compose incidental music to fill in the gaps between songs in his film musicals; he also worked in a craftsman-like way with assistants, actors, and songwriters to produce a musical score with a tonal design that reflects the meaning of the film. Stothart reveled in using compilation scores, yet he was also aware that music in film should be structured to reflect its narrative. Stothart's score for the film was a mix of original material, adaptations of themes from Arlen's songs, and other pieces, including tunes by Mendelssohn and Mussorgsky (used in the Witches Castle) and the popular song, "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," by Egbert Van Alstyne and Harry Williams (used for the orchard scene). An adaptation of Robert Schumann's children's piano piece, "The Jolly Farmer," was also used at the beginning of the film to accompany scenes of Dorothy's farm home in Kansas.

⁹The "Cyclone" cue is attributed to Bassman and Stoll by Harnetz, 95–96.

¹⁰Harnetz, 62. Emphasis mine.

III. Music in "The Wizard"

A. Position Asserting in the Narrative Film Score

Unlike music analysis, literary analysis has been consistently viewed as reader oriented. Late twentieth-century manifestations of literary theory have cropped up in the forms of psychoanalysis, Marxist analysis, semiotics, postmodernism, and feminist theory, to name a few. Both the book and film versions of *The Wizard of Oz* have been the subject of a great deal of analysis by literary and film scholars. *Oz* as literature and fairy tale has been dealt with by writers such as Gore Vidal, Ray Bradbury, Osmond Beckwith, Marius Bewley, and others.¹¹ Psychoanalytic analyses of the film have been given by Daniel Derven, Harvey Greenberg, and Paul Nathanson.¹² Marxist analyses include those by Gregory Renault, S. J. Sackett, Henry Littlefield, and Linda Hansen.¹³ A theological reading is given by David Downing.¹⁴ Finally, a rather quirky, almost "stream-of-consciousness" analysis of the film by Salman Rushdie should also be noted.¹⁵

Through the many layers of analysis, most sources agree that the primary theme of *The Wizard of Oz* (both film and book) is departing from, and returning to, "home." Derven's psychoanalytic analyses view this departure and return as an adolescent girl's terror and then accommodation

¹¹These articles are all found in L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, ed. Michael Patrick Hearn (New York: Schocken Books, 1983): Gore Vidal, "On Rereading the Oz Books" (256–70); Ray Bradbury, "Because, Because, Because, Because of the Wonderful Things He Does" (247–51); Osmond Beckwith, "The Oddness of Oz" (233–46); Marius Bewley, "The Land of Oz: America's Great Good Place" (199–206).

¹²(Freudian) Daniel Derven, "Over the Rainbow and under the Twister: A Drama of the Girl's Passage through the Phallic Phase," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 42 (1978): 51–57; (Personality Development) Harvey Greenberg, "The Wizard of Oz: Little Girl Lost—and Found," in *The Movies on Your Mind* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975), 169–80; (Jungian) Paul Nathanson, *Over the Rainbow: "The Wizard of Oz" as a Secular Myth of America* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), especially chapter 3, 78–104.

¹³Gregory Renault, "Over the Rainbow: Dialectic and Ideology in *The Wizard of Oz*," *Praxis* 4 (1978): 169–80; S. J. Sackett, "The Utopia of Oz," in Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, 207–20; Henry Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," in Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, 221–32; Linda Hansen, "Experiencing the World as Home: Reflections on Dorothy's Quest in *The Wizard of Oz*," *Soundings* 67 (1984): 91–102.

¹⁴David Downing, "Waiting for Godoz: A Post-Nasal Deconstruction of *The Wizard of Oz*," *Christianity and Literature* 33, no. 2 (1984): 28–30.

¹⁵Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (Worcester: The British Film Institute, 1992).

of her sexuality. Sackett's Marxist analyses view the myth as that of the American landscape, of leaving the wilderness to seek out the urban utopia, only to find that the pastoral farm (which mediates city and wilderness) is the ideal "home." Hansen's feminist analyses view the tale as Dorothy's journey from impotence to power coupled with her "readiness" to come home.

Along with these analyses, there can also be a musical analysis of the film *The Wizard of Oz* that reflects the literary theme of departure and return. In the film, tonal areas in songs and musical cues can be traced, and when these are graphed in a linear manner, conclusions can be drawn by the analyst regarding a coherent tonal structure. In making such an analysis, one must take into account some system of tonal functions as a point of reference. In the case of *The Wizard*, the traditional role of tonic and dominant along with an interval cycle of perfect fifths will suffice. As will be shown below, a tonal design of ascending and descending fifths is projected, with tonic serving as the point of repose (home) and dominant serving a double function as agent for departure and return.

Finding a tonal design in a film can be compared to Daniel Harrison's conception of "position asserting" in a musical work. Harrison describes position asserting as follows:

In chromatic music, if the listener cannot find Tonic, Tonic often finds the listener. . . . Instead of using intervals to find tonic, a tonic is given, and its intervals are thereby defined.¹⁶

As Harrison explains, in much chromatic (e.g., late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century) music, the listener gets a sense of tonic in a piece, even though diatonic functions of scale degrees are not apparent. Tonic is asserted through harmonic context instead of content and by tonal behavior instead of by the function of pitch classes. Tonic can be discerned by the listener/analyst through certain "rhetorical techniques," including: (1) tonic function as ending a composition, (2) tonic function as beginning a compositional section, (3) harmonic stasis and immobility attract tonic function, and (4) thematic exposition heard in a tonic context. He illustrates these techniques with pieces by Richard Strauss, Busoni, Scriabin, and Reger.¹⁷

¹⁶Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 75.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 76–80.

Though Harrison limits his analytical discourse to the musical score itself, his methodology is rooted in an esthetic, listener-oriented perspective of analysis. In this regard, his views are similar to those of Richmond Browne's "position finding" and Charles Smith's "presentational tonality."¹⁸ These analyses do not seek to recreate the composer's intention, but rather center on the analyst's reading of the musical surface.

To adapt Harrison's ideas on position asserting to film music, we need to reconsider the notion of "tonic." Taken broadly, Harrison's conception of tonic may be expanded to "points of tonal clarity" in a score. These tonal points may begin a section, end a section, or emerge from tonal ambiguity or obscurity. Given these points of tonal clarity, more points can be sought at different hierarchical levels, creating a design of "local tonics" or tonal areas within a larger musical structure. A collection of local tonics in a large structure can then be read for the same rhetorical techniques at a higher level.

Harrison's techniques of position asserting can be used to discover tonal designs in film scores. The major difference between Harrison's examples and those in film music is that Harrison describes a protocol for listening to a chromatic musical work where there is a conformity from one musical event to another, and this conformity aids the listener's understanding of the tonal field. As Neumeier points out, however, in a film score this musical conformity (i.e., continuous musical field) is often absent, largely due to a lack of music for varying expanses of time. Perceptual problems aside, I would argue that it is precisely this absence of music that reifies a sense of tonic in the musical cues that follow silences in film. The film-score listener may find localized tonics in the beginnings and/or endings of musical cues (Harrison's first and second techniques). Moreover, the listener may seek points of tonal clarity in musical cues that emerge from silence or tonal ambiguity. In film musicals such as *The Wizard of Oz*, the analyst may use Harrison's techniques to find the keys of individual songs in the film and to combine these keys into an overall tonal design for the film. Finally, and most specifically for film music, a listener may seek a tonic function in a musical cue that coincides with an important narrative or visual event in the film. While this last technique does not match Harrison's list of rhetorical techniques, it seems appropriate in the study of film music.

¹⁸Richmond Browne, "Tonal Implications of the Diatonic Set," *In Theory Only* 5, nos. 6–7 (July-August 1981): 3–21; and Charles Smith, "The Functional Extravagance of Chromatic Chords," *Music Theory Spectrum* 8 (1986): 94–139.

Having found these localized “tonics” in a film score, it follows that the analyst (if not the serious listener) will seek a deeper-level structure or design to investigate a close relationship between music and the film’s narrative. The first step might be to list the tonics (as tonal areas) in a syntagmatic string. Next, the analyst might summarize the string and find patterns of organization. In seeking such patterns, the analyst needs to be open to nontraditional tonal designs. For example, as Neumeier points out, some films (following opera) display a double-tonic complex. Other films, such as the Stothart operetta musicals, display a teleological design that progresses from one or two tonics to a different, single tonic at the end. Such a design resembles the “progressive” tonal designs of nineteenth-century opera or Mahler symphonies. Finally, a score may be “closed”; that is, the film opens and closes in the same key, but may or may not prolong the tonic in a traditional manner.

There is a difference between a tonally closed design and “tonal closure.” Indeed, beginning and ending a film in the same key was (and probably still is) a common procedure, which may lead to a tonally closed design. “Tonal closure” as used here suggests a greater significance, however. As the above quote from Schenker suggests, tonal closure refers to a teleological procedure that accounts for *all* tonal activity in a piece: the establishment of a tonal center as tonic, the departure from that tonal center, and the return to the tonal center as the final tonic. Kofi Agawu notes such closure as having three attributes: (1) it is a function of formal principles and/or generic signs that signal how a piece will end; (2) it is not the same thing as an ending, but rather a sum total of all the tendencies to close in the composition, whether or not these are actually fulfilled; (3) it is a function of both syntactic and semantic principles.¹⁹ For Agawu, closure is a total process, the combined result of the musical structures that are in place to signal an ending. As such, closure also has semantic as well as syntactic properties, and so music and narrative are tied together in mutual reinforcement.

In a film score, syntactic patterns of closure might manifest themselves in many ways: traditional functional harmonic structures or progressions, the deployment of interval cycles or symmetries, or other teleological tonal patterns. Tonal designs may also be based on the use of keys to symbolize characters, locations, or situations in a narrative. The progression of tonal

¹⁹Kofi Agawu, “Concepts of Closure and Chopin’s opus 28,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 9 (1987): 4.

areas in a film may reflect the progression of characters in a narrative, as in the film *Maytime*.²⁰ An analysis of *The Wizard of Oz* provides a good example of a tonal design which contains characteristics of tonal symbolism for both characters and locations, while also exhibiting a highly traditional large-scale tonal structure. And while (as Neumeyer points out) one is on safer ground to refer to "tonal design" in a film score rather than "tonal structure," the argument for the score of *The Wizard* as *structure* is compelling, as will be shown below.²¹

B. A Tonal Reading of "The Wizard of Oz"

For the analysis, I have divided the film into six sequences: "Kansas Prologue," "Munchkinland," "S[care]C[row]/T[in]M[an]/C[owardly]L[ion]," "Journey to the Emerald City," "The Quest for the Witch's Broomstick," and "Emerald City Reprise and Kansas Epilogue." In each sequence, a tonal process that reflects the narrative is in place. In some cases, the tonal design reflects a key symbolism (e.g., E-flat for the Emerald City), while in other sequences, the tonal design may reflect tonal motion that supports the narrative (e.g., traveling down the Yellow Brick Road). A-flat is a referential tonal area, reappearing at various crucial points in the film's narrative; it also functions as the large-scale dominant, serving the double function of agent for departure and return.

The film opens with an overture in D-flat over the opening credits. As the credits end, Stothart modulates to A major and quotes "The Jolly Farmer," a children's piece by Robert Schumann originally for piano. This modulation, while a bit unsettling, foreshadows several other chromatic tonal motions in the film. After an absence of music for a time, Dorothy sings "Over the Rainbow" in the key of A-flat. The song has barely ended as Elvira Gulch's/The Witch's theme sounds. The theme has been labeled as "atonal" by some; it is indeed difficult to detect a tonal center for it. The theme is highly chromatic and has a narrow compass of a major third. After plans to take Toto away from Dorothy have been made, then thwarted, Dorothy runs away. Music in this section is in G major. G is distantly related

²⁰See my "Tonal Design and the Aesthetic of Pastiche in Herbert Stothart's *Maytime*."

²¹I use these terms as defined by David Beach in "Schubert's Experiments with Sonata Form: Formal-Tonal Design versus Underlying Structure," *Music Theory Spectrum* 15, no. 1 (1993): 1–18. "Design" refers to the layout of keys in a composition, as opposed to the underlying "structure" in a Schenkerian sense.

to D-flat and thus serves as a good “runaway” key. It also foreshadows the subsequent “traveling music” of Dorothy in Munchkinland. Professor Marvel is introduced by the key of D-flat (tonic—which now serves more as the subdominant), looks into his crystal ball (F minor) and refers to Aunt Em (A-flat). The A-flat tonal area represents the structural dominant and represents a pivot point of the film: is it an agent of return to tonic (and representative of Dorothy returning home), or is it an agent of departure to other key areas (and symbolic of Dorothy’s journey to Oz)? The cyclone music is in B minor, interrupting the prolongation of A-flat. The flying house montage begins in A-flat, functioning here as an agent for departure and resolving the return/departure issue. From A-flat, tonal motions ascend stepwise through A, B-flat and C. As Dorothy sees the sight of Miss Gulch transforming into the Wicked Witch, the tonal centers rise through ascending fifths, B/F-sharp/C-sharp, creating an increase of tension and signaling a more abrupt and distant motion away from the tonic. The tonal plan of the prologue is summarized in example 1.

Once in Oz, the landing of Dorothy’s house is first met with silence. Then, as she opens her front door (and the screen is bathed in color), a whole-tone cue sounds. The tonal ambiguity of the whole-tone segment is clarified by a quote from “Over the Rainbow” (“OTRB”) in E-flat, which serves as tonic for the “Munchkinland” sequence. Dorothy’s “I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore” line is accompanied by music in A-flat, again referring to the dual function of the dominant—she remembers Kansas but is no longer there. The appearance of Glinda is in D-flat (old tonic) now serving as subdominant of A-flat. Reference to the Wicked Witch of the West is in B minor, a distantly related key (more on this below).

Example 1. Tonal design of “Kansas Prologue” sequence

Opening titles

“Over the Rainbow”

Run Away

Aunt Em

Montage

Elvira/Witch

“Jolly Farmer”

Elvira Gulch

Prof. Marvel

Cyclone

Finally, the last scene of the sequence signals the departure of Dorothy on the Yellow Brick Road by leaving E-flat for G major. This final segment is rich in tonal symbolism, with the reference to Kansas (“The Jolly Farmer”) now in the new tonic (E-flat), references to the Wizard in A-flat (the new hope of getting home), the Emerald City in E, and “Over the Rainbow” in D signaling a new departure in G.

The next musical sequence, “S[care]C[row]/T[in]M[an]/C[owardly] L[ion],” begins in the Munchkinland key of E-flat, illustrating a tonal link with the previous sequence. The score promptly moves to A-flat and remains, however. The exceptions to the A-flat tonal areas include the Scarecrow’s song, “If I Only Had a Brain” in D (but sung by the other characters in E-flat),²² and the apple tree scene with nondiegetic music in E, C, and A. The tonal design for this sequence is illustrated in example 3.

The return to A-flat can be explained by the fact that the characters who become Dorothy’s friends have their counterparts in Kansas. The parallel of Oz to Kansas also explains the rather conservative tonal structure of the film as a whole. Oz is a fantastic place, but it is actually only Dorothy’s dream. Thus really (and tonally), Oz is not so far off; it is only as far away as Dorothy’s imagination.

Example 3. Tonal design of “SC/TM/CL” sequence

SC
"Off to See the Wizard"

Apple Trees

TM Song
TM Dance

Witch
"OTRB"

"Lions, Tigers, Bears..."

CL
"Off to See" (rep.)

²²I could not come up with a good analytical solution for this tonal anomaly. The answer probably lies in the fact that Bolger just sang the song better in D. One can detect some vocal discomfort by Bolger in the subsequent reprises of the song sung with the other characters in E-flat. In short, D was just Bolger’s “key”; E-flat was too high. The graph of example 3 contains a parenthetical E-flat for the Scarecrow’s song, to match the E-flat/A-flat motion of the Tin Man’s and Cowardly Lion’s songs to their reprises of “We’re Off to See the Wizard.”

Example 5. Tonal design of “Quest” sequence

The next sequence, “The Quest for the Witch’s Broomstick” further emphasizes the double-tonic complex, especially by using A as a focal point for the evil characters. As the graph in example 5 shows, A is the key for the Flying Monkeys and the Winkie Guards. The only reference to a “good key” is A-flat, when Dorothy states “I’m frightened” in the Witch’s Castle. The sequence also quotes excerpts of music by Mendelssohn and Mussorgsky, highlighting Stothart’s penchant for using compilation scores. The “Chase” features a sequencing of keys downward from D, to C, B-flat and A-flat (another “good key,” but incidental here).

The “Return to Emerald City” sequence begins with another circle-of-fifths pattern as the characters receive the symbols of their newly found attributes. The tonal pattern falls “down” the circle of fifths to the flat keys, signaling the beginning of a return “home.” The Scarecrow receives his diploma in D (perhaps reprising the key of his “Only had a Brain” song); the Lion receives his medal in G; and the Tin Man receives his “heart” in C. The Wizard then recounts his days as a balloonist to an oriental-sounding tune in F minor. An ellipsis of two keys in the circle-of-fifths pattern results in Dorothy expressing her hope to get home in A-flat. The Wizard departs in his balloon, accompanied by a march in A major. While A major is not “evil” here, it portrays another barrier, or plan thwarted, to reaching home, just as with the portrayal of the poppy field earlier.

The journey home from Oz really begins as Dorothy says good-bye to her friends. A quotation of “Over the Rainbow” is played in E-flat. Having failed to leave Oz, Glinda (acting as an agent for Dorothy’s return) appears with music in A-flat, and reassures Dorothy that she is able to leave through the power of the Ruby Slippers. At this point, the music moves to D-flat. Once Glinda has reassured her of her “power,” Dorothy is already home: she has realized the value of her journey through Oz. As she chants “There’s no place like home,” Stothart’s score remains firmly ensconced in tonic D-flat through the return to Kansas and the end of the film. The “Return to Emerald City” sequence is summarized in example 6.

Example 6. Tonal design of "Return to Emerald City" and "Kansas Epilogue sequences"

SC/CL/TM testimonials Prof. Marvel reference Dorothy "OTRB" march Glinda's reappearance "No place like home" Kansas

We note that the film's theme of departing home and homecoming must have been very compelling to Stothart, as we stand back from the tonal design and synthesize it into a coherent structure. The striking features of the film's score as a whole are that it is tonally closed and reflects a large-scale tonal organization worthy of Schenkerian analysis. The film begins and ends in the key of D-flat. The tonic sections coincide with the "Kansas" sequences, while the Oz sequences (while modulating to different keys) are controlled, or prolonged, by the dominant A-flat and the V/V tonal area, E-flat. Thus, Stothart's score can be read as mirroring the theme of the film: it (the score) is about "leaving home" (tonic) and returning to it.

A Schenkerian rendering of the film's tonal design is shown in example 7. The graph even reveals the A/E_b tritone (in the box, connected by the dotted line) found in the witch's scenes. The E_b (2̂) of the fundamental structure is

Example 7. Tonal structure of *The Wizard of Oz*

3̂ 2̂ N 2̂ 1̂

D_b: I V V/V V

Scene: Kansas "Over the Rainbow" "Munchkinland" SC/TM/CL Emerald City Poppy Field/Witches Domain Oz Reprise Epilogue

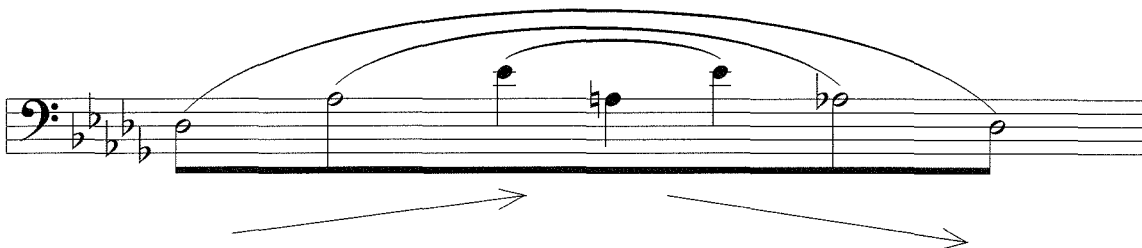
approached by an E, which functions as a chromatic upper neighbor tone, while the A is a dissonant tritone nested within the prolongation of E \flat .

The elaborate prolongation of the dominant is apt for *The Wizard*, as dominant serves a dual function as agent for both departure from and return to the tonic. The initial departure occurs with Judy Garland singing “Over the Rainbow” in the key of A-flat while still on her Kansas farm. From that point on, A-flat is prolonged throughout the remainder of the Kansas sequence and throughout the Oz dream sequence, finally resolving back to tonic as Glinda, the good witch, explains the power of the Ruby Slippers to send Dorothy home. Appropriately, the Oz sequence ends with quotations of “Over the Rainbow” and “There’s No Place Like Home” in the tonic, D-flat, and the epilogue in Kansas is in D-flat to the end of the film.

Example 8 reveals just how closely the large-scale tonal structure conforms to the narrative of the film through symbolism. D-flat is “home”—that is, Kansas. A-flat is Oz, foreshadowed by Dorothy as early as the “Over the Rainbow” song on the farm. A-flat serves a double function, both as an agent of motion away from tonic as well as an agent for return. The dominant of A-flat, E-flat, also figures prominently in the film as another agent of departure/return, as the tonal area “farthest out.” The diagram of example 8 even appears as a tonal “rainbow,” with the arch representing departure from home and return.

On the surface, the simple tonal motion of the film score to the dominant and its dominant does not really present a very “fantastic” tonal organization. After all, Oz is a fantastic land, not at all related to Kansas. Or is it? Though many tonal areas are used in the film to represent the fantastic nature of Oz, the design remains anchored in a rather conservative tonal structure in the background.

Example 8. “Rainbow” tonal design of *The Wizard*



IV. Conclusion

The three quotes at the beginning of this article reflect a common thread of the semantic properties inherent in narrative, music, and life. Dorothy utters her lines soon after waking up in her bed in Kansas after her Oz adventure. While she makes friends and has adventures in Oz, she wants to return home. Before she can do so, however, she must grow up, or as Nathanson puts it, she has to learn "how to be at home."²⁴ In order for Dorothy to learn to be comfortable at home, she has to leave home. The T. S. Eliot quote seems to affirm this idea. In the poem, he affirms the necessity of leaving home in order to learn to live at home. He affirms both "the quest" and "the return." Finally, this is also exactly what Schenker means in his quote. Being in a "home key" is not necessarily the same as remaining in that key. Rather, it is a trajectory full of "obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and in short, retardations of all kinds." In order to know tonic fully, we must explore other tonal areas in the course of a musical work.

It is significant that *The Wizard of Oz* employs a tonally closed film score. The musical score reflects the narrative theme of departure/homecoming in the film as a whole, whether Stothart was aware of this parallel or not (though I believe he was). As viewers, we know that as the score finds its way to tonic toward the end of the film, Dorothy will find her way home to Kansas. The music of the film is thus a good example of the conformance of music with narrative, not only music in the specific sense of Stothart's score, but music in the sense of Schenkerian tonal structure. When compared to narrative, what music does tonally becomes not just syntactic but semantic. As Dorothy returns home, so the music returns "home" to tonic.

The ability of the film viewer and listener to track the tonal design of the music to the film can be attributed to the listener's and/or analyst's ability for position assertion of tonic. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the process is simplified by a tonal design understood by the composer and listener and, most importantly, by both constituencies' understanding of the film's narrative. Thus, in the case of *The Wizard of Oz*, we need not "get into the mind" of Herbert Stothart to perform an analysis of the music in the film. We need only to trust our instincts about tonality, and to use the tools at our disposal to read the film and draw comparisons between the tonal design and the narrative.

²⁴Nathanson, 109.