

50th Anniversary

The Wonderful  
WIZARD  
of OZ

L. Frank Baum

Illustrated with the Original Drawings  
by W. W. Denslow  
With a New Introduction by Regina Ferrell





# Table of Contents

[From the Pages of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[L. Frank Baum](#)

[The World of L. Frank Baum and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#)

[The First American Children's Book](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter I. - The Cyclone,](#)

[Chapter II. - The Council with The Munchkins.](#)

[Chapter III - How Dorothy saved the Scarecrow.](#)

[Chapter IV. - The Road through the Forest.](#)

[Chapter V. - The Rescue of the Tin Woodman<<](#)

[Chapter VI. - The Cowardly Lion.](#)

[Chapter VII. - The Journey to The Great Oz.](#)

[Chapter VIII. - The Deadly Poppy Field.](#)

[Chapter IX. - The Queen of the Field Mice.](#)

[Chapter X. - The Guardian of the Gates.](#)

[Chapter XI. - The Wonderful Emerald City of OZ. Emerald City Oz.](#)

[Chapter XII. - Then 5carctv for the Wicked Witch.](#)

[Chapter XIII. - The Rescve](#)

[Chapter XIV. - The Winged Morvkeys](#)

[Chapter XV. - The Discovery of oz, The Terrible.](#)

[Chapter XVI. - The Magic Art of the Great Humbug.](#)

[Chapter XVII. - How the Ballo was Launched.](#)

[Chapter XVIII. - Away to the south.](#)

[Chapter XIX. - Attacked by the Fighting Trees.](#)

[Chapter XX. - 'The Dainty China Country.](#)

[Chapter XXI. - The Lion Becomes The King of Beasts.](#)

[Chapter XXII. - The Country of the Quadlings](#)

[Chapter XXIII. - The Good Witch Grants Dorothy's](#)

[Home Again.](#)

[Endnotes](#)

[Inspired by The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#)

[Comments & Questions](#)

[For Further Reading](#)

## From the Pages of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

“You are welcome, most noble Sorceress, to the land of Munchkins. We are so grateful to you for having killed the wicked Witch of the East, and for setting our people free from bondage.” (page 22)

While Dorothy was looking earnestly into the queer, painted face of the Scarecrow, she was surprised to see one of the eyes slowly wink at her. She thought she must have been mistaken, at first, for none of the scarecrows in Kansas ever wink. (page 35)

“No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home.” (page 42)

“I shall take the heart,” returned the Tin Woodman; “for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world.” (page 55)

“If you don’t mind, I’ll go with you,” said the Lion, “for my life is simply unbearable without a bit of courage.” (page 63)

They now came upon more and more of the big scarlet poppies, and fewer and fewer of the other flowers; and soon they found themselves in the midst of a great meadow of poppies. Now it is well known that when there are many of these flowers together their odor is so powerful that anyone who breathes it falls asleep, and if the sleeper is not carried away from the scent of the flowers he sleeps on and on forever. (pages 78-80)

“You killed the Witch of the East and you wear the silver shoes, which bear a powerful charm. There is now but one Wicked Witch left in all this land, and when you can tell me she is dead I will send you back to Kansas—but not before.” (pages 108-109)

This made Dorothy so very angry that she picked up the bucket of water that stood near and dashed it over the Witch, wetting her from head to foot. (page 127)

As the Monkey King finished his story Dorothy looked down and saw the green, shining walls of the Emerald City before them. She wondered at the rapid flight of the Monkeys, but was glad the journey was over. (page 144)

“I am Oz, the Great and Terrible,” said the little man, in a trembling voice, “but don’t strike me—please don’t!—and I’ll do anything you want me to.” (page 150)

“Can’t you give me brains?” asked the Scarecrow.

“You don’t need them. You are learning something every day. A baby has brains, but it doesn’t know much. Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge, and the longer you are on earth the more experience you are sure to get.” (page 154)

“But I don’t want to live here,” cried Dorothy. “I want to go to Kansas, and live with Aunt Em and Uncle Henry.” (page 174)

Dorothy said nothing. Oz had not kept the promise he made her, but he had done his best, so she forgave him. As he said, he was a good man, even if he was a bad Wizard. (page 182)

When they were all quite presentable they followed the soldier girl into a big room where the Witch Glinda sat upon a throne of rubies. (page 207)

Dorothy now took Toto up solemnly in her arms, and having said one last good-bye she clapped the heels of her shoes together three times, saying, “Take me home to Aunt Em!” (page 211)

# THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

*L. Frank Baum*

*Pictures by W. W. Denslow*

*With an Introduction and Notes by J. T. Barbarese*

George Stade  
Consulting Editorial Director



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## L. Frank Baum

When Lyman Frank Baum asked Maud Gage to marry him in 1882, the girl's mother, a pioneering feminist, fiercely opposed the union. She apparently had good reason: The privileged son of a wealthy oilman, Baum led an itinerant life, uncertain of his future career; at the time, he was acting in a touring theatrical production funded by his father. Maud nevertheless went through with the marriage and found her husband to be a passionate, hardworking dreamer. Like his contemporary Mark Twain, Baum would reach the height of literary success only to have its fruits foiled by ill-timed and often fanciful investments.

If character was destiny for Baum, then early aspirations foretold a future in literature. Born in Chittenango, New York, in 1856, Frank spent his childhood on the Baum family estate, where he was given a printing press and created a family newspaper, the *Rose Lawn Home Journal*, with his brother. Despite a congenital heart ailment, Baum was quite active as a young man. He began writing professional newspaper articles, plays, poetry, and even a primer on breeding Hamburg chickens in the years following the American Civil War.

When his father and older brother died in 1887, the family's fortunes declined, and Baum and his wife moved to Aberdeen in the Dakota Territory, where Maud's brothers and sisters were living. Baum started a general store, Baum's Bazaar, where local children gathered for candy and the imaginative stories Baum told for their entertainment. But their generous extensions of credit to drought-plagued ranchers and farmers forced the couple out of business in 1890. An ill-timed foray into newspaper editing and other publishing ventures left them bankrupt and poised for another move, this time to Chicago. To make ends meet, Frank worked as a reporter and, with good success, as a traveling salesman for the glassware company Pitkin and Brooks.

Although Baum's four sons had long enjoyed their father's fantastical stories, Baum did not publish his tales until *Mother Goose in Prose* appeared in 1897. Its success inspired *Father Goose, His Book* (1899), which was the best-selling children's book of the year. But it was the story of a farm girl named Dorothy, first told to his sons and neighborhood children in 1898, that became an instant success and would endure as a perpetual classic. Published as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900, with illustrations by William Wallace Denslow, Baum's tale flew out of stores and, when it was staged in 1902, sold out theaters from New York to Chicago.

Thrilled by the novel's reception, Baum wrote many sequels to the Oz story and enjoyed considerable financial success. But he also wanted to expand his repertoire beyond stories about Oz. His other books, some published under pen names, include *Queen Zixi of Ix* (1905), *The Fate of a Crown* (1905), and the teen series *Aunt Jane's Nieces* (1906 through 1915). While these works enjoyed a healthy readership, failed business choices and his audience's insatiable thirst for more Oz stories, kept him writing sequels until his death.

Always the devoted family man, Baum spent his final years living a quiet life in California. The grounds of his house (named Ozcot) were lush with Baum's prize-

winning flowers, which he cultivated until heart and gallbladder problems seriously threatened his health. Frank Baum died of a heart attack on May 6, 1919.

## The World of L. Frank Baum and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

- 1856** Lyman Frank Baum is born on May 15 in Chittenango, New York, to Cynthia Stanton Baum and Benjamin Ward Baum. Having made a sizable fortune in oil and other business ventures, Benjamin is able to raise his family of nine children in comfort.
- 1861** The American Civil War begins. Benjamin's prospects continue to improve, allowing him to purchase a country mansion outside Syracuse, New York; called Rose Lawn, it has grounds large enough for young Frank to keep a flock of bantam chickens. Frank is a frail child, having been born with a heart ailment that will plague him into adulthood.
- 1865** The Civil War ends on April 9, and President Lincoln is assassinated five days later.
- 1866** Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is published. Baum will later be compared to Carroll because they both wrote about a young female protagonist.
- 1868** Frank is sent to Peekskill Military Academy; he loathes the school's exacting discipline and schedule. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is published.
- 1870** Frank's ill health allows him to leave Peekskill Military Academy.
- 1871** Early interests in writing and journalism lead Frank to create a household newspaper, the *Rose Lawn Home Journal*.
- 1873** Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* is published.
- 1876** Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is published.
- 1877** Baum begins writing professional journal articles and becomes involved in the theater.
- 1878** With high hopes for a stage career, he begins acting with the Union Square Theatre in Manhattan.
- 1882** Benjamin Baum funds a theater company for Frank, who writes his first play, *The Maid of Arran*. The production, with Frank in the lead role, enjoys some critical and commercial success during its two-year run. Baum marries Maud Gage.
- 1883** Baum and Maud have a child, Frank Joslyn. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is published.
- 1884** Mismanagement and probable embezzlement by a book keeper cause the theater company to fold. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* appears.
- 1885** Baum sells Baum's Castorine, an axle grease, for his family's oil company.
- 1886** Baum writes his first book, *The Book of Hamburgs*, on the breeding and care of Hamburg chickens. Baum's second son, Robert, is born.
- 1887** Benjamin Baum and his oldest son die. With the loss of the two competent

Baum businessmen, the family's income is greatly reduced. Frank and Maud Baum move to Aberdeen in the Dakota Territory, where they start a general store.

- 1890** Baum's third son, Harry, is born. Baum's store fails. Baum takes over as temporary editor of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, for which he writes articles and columns.
- 1891** Baum's fourth son, Kenneth, is born. Almost penniless, Baum moves to Chicago, where he becomes a reporter for the *Evening Post*.
- 1892** Unable to support his family on the scant wages of a reporter, Baum also works as a traveling salesman for the chinaware company Pitkin and Brooks.
- 1893** The enormous World's Columbian Exposition comes to Chicago. The United States experiences an economic depression.
- 1894** Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* is published.
- 1897** Baum's first children's story, *Mother Goose in Prose*, is published, with illustrations by Maxfield Parrish. Forced by ill health to give up selling, Baum founds *Show Window*, a journal on window trimming. The writer Opie Read introduces Baum to William Denslow, who will later illustrate books by Baum.
- 1899** *Father Goose, His Book*, with illustrations by Denslow, is published by George M. Hill company. Its success—it sells more copies than any other children's book this year—encourages Baum to continue writing. With extra money on hand, he buys a summerhouse in Macatawa Park, Michigan, that he names the Sign of the Goose.
- 1900** *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, with illustrations by Denslow, is published to resounding success. It has been in print ever since.
- 1901** *Dot and Tot of Merryland*, with illustrations by Denslow, is published.
- 1902** *The Wizard of Oz* is produced as a musical in Chicago and is sensationally popular. Baum splits with his illustrator William Denslow.
- 1903** The musical of *The Wizard of Oz* opens in New York. Baum tries to branch out by publishing the children's book *The Enchanted Island of Yew*, but it has little success.
- 1904** Responding to high demand for another Oz tale, Baum publishes a second novel, *The Marvelous Land of Oz*.
- 1905** *Queen Zixi of Ix* is published. Determined to write other kinds of works, Baum publishes an adult romance, *The Fate of a Crown*, under the pseudonym Schuyler Staunton.
- 1906** Baum publishes *Aunt Jane's Nieces*, the first of a series of ten novels written under the pen name Edith van Dyne.
- 1907** *Ozma of Oz* is published.
- 1908** Baum publishes *Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz*, in which he first calls himself the "Royal Historian of Oz." His *American Fairy Tales* appears.
- 1910** Baum tries to end the Oz series with *The Emerald City of Oz*. The Baum family moves to California. Struggling with poor health, Baum oversees the building of a house he calls Ozcot.

- 1911** *Peter and Wendy*, J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* play in novel form, is published.
- 1913** Because Baum's non-Oz books are not as successful as his Oz stories and he needs money, he writes *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* .
- 1914** Dreams of adapting his tales for film lead Baum to buy a movie production company; but it fails after producing a handful of films. World War I begins.
- 1918** Coronary illness and gallbladder surgery lead to a protracted period of bed rest. Despite his failing health, Baum continues to write.
- 1919** Baum has a heart attack on May 5, shortly after *The Magic of Oz* is published. He dies within twenty-four hours.
- 1920** Baum's final Oz story, *Glinda of Oz* , is published. Ruth Plumly Thompson takes over as "Royal Historian of Oz."
- 1939** MGM releases the classic film *The Wizard of Oz* , starring sixteen-year-old Judy Garland.

## The First American Children's Book

The first thing that you notice is what Dorothy notices: Kansas is gray.

When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else (pp. 13-14).

Frank Baum was not the first to give Americans an American landscape in a children's book. Twain had done it in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and even more radically in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and Alcott had led out a suite of American pre-teens who grow into young adulthood with the March girls. But Twain and Alcott were writing juvenile books for a more mature audience. This book is Dorothy's, and Dorothy is a child, in her own words, "a helpless girl" and clearly if indefinably younger than any host of a child's narrative that Americans had encountered before 1900. We see Dorothy's world through Dorothy's eyes, a world constructed and policed, farmed and furnished by adults but modulated by a prose style that is childlike without being childish. In Dorothy, Baum gave America the first truly American *child* protagonist.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the only two competing contemporary versions of pre-teen female protagonists, Lewis Carroll's Alice and J. M. Barrie's Wendy (both ten-year-old girls), Baum put Dorothy in a book that features none of the potential cognitive difficulties that still tend to drive children (and some adults) away from the texts of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. Though he admired *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), he also found it "rambling and incoherent," a judgment echoed by subsequent critics, and apparently refused Carroll's example of a highly internalized and ironic vision of a child's world.<sup>2</sup> The openings alone reveal the vast differences between these visions of childhood:

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"

So she was considering in her own mind, (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid,) whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There really is no "exterior" here because the author is taking advantage of the

potential for exploiting a characteristic of children's narrative, the tendency to drift between literary and social space. It is all happening "in her own mind"—there are at least three such references in the opening paragraph—and in the syntactic environment, where the reader's attention is shunted like a Ping-Pong ball through bits of interior monologue ("and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?") and gates of parentheses, which suggest a mind that is capable of reflecting on itself, resulting in the severely hypotactic style we associate with high-octane Victorian satire, while the narrative elides interior and exterior and, by the third paragraph, is *in Wonderland*.

Baum also understood the central dilemma of any writer entering the genre—that children lend their name to the genre and nothing else—and dedicated himself to creating a thoroughly exteriorized vision of a child who finds herself in trouble. In that consists the decisive difference between Dorothy and her nearest British and European counterparts. Alice's rabbit hole is not only a corridor to Wonderland but a passage into the unconscious; the result is a serially distorted view of a world she is not all that anxious to get back to as well as a mockery of ordered thought and behavior with no self-enunciating moral or logical center. Scholars love *Alice in Wonderland* because there is so much space for interpretive intervention; but scholarship, and Freud especially, has no place to stand in Oz and very little to say to Dorothy or about her journey. Oz is a lot of things—colorful, dangerous, silly—but no means as obsessively deranged or as "morally unintelligible" as Wonderland.<sup>3</sup> The world of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is optimistic, not sarcastically aloof or, as it so often is in Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), archly satirical. Wonderland is a psychic, not a physical torment; Neverland is a theme park where the dominant modality is nostalgia. But Oz is a balloon ride away. MGM's decision to transform Dorothy into a trauma victim and Oz into a mental state blurs the essential difference between these two radically opposed visions of fairy tale and, possibly deliberately, turns Dorothy into an American Alice and a gracefully nuanced American romance into a psychological allegory. Given Hollywood's obsession with total cinematic disclosure and its prime directive that no fact must ever go unexplained, you get the 1939 film—a work of genius, but not of Baum's genius.<sup>4</sup>

So for readers who come to the novel after having grown up with the movie, the biggest shock is to find in the novel none of the film's comforting, gap-filling backstory. Some of the cinematic revisions, such as the snowstorm that wakes the sleepers in the poppy field and that replaces their rescue by the Queen of the Mice in chapter IX, were cost-efficient alternatives to special effects that might have proven impossible or inadequate to the illusion.<sup>5</sup> The change from Silver Shoes to Ruby Slippers in the 1939 movie, as most people know, was dictated by technical considerations (red showed up more vividly on the film stock of the period than silver); and American culture would be poorer without some of its memorable dialogue. But the principal changes are in the overall characterization and in retrospect seem less defensible. In the book Uncle Henry and Auntie Em never really emerge from the background and appear together only in chapter I, Auntie Em appearing alone in the very brief closing chapter. The film, however, shows them as loveable (if two-toned) representatives of a loveable Kansas home. Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch

turns out to be one more ripple in Dorothy's concussed subconscious and the Kansas prototype of the Wicked Witch of the West, who even has a *name*—Almira Gulch. Auntie Em is hardly the “thin and gaunt,” childless old woman whose eyes had lost their sparkle and were as gray as Kansas. She is an all-American original with a tongue and a personality to match. “Almira Gulch,” she says on hearing of Almira's plan to destroy Toto, “just because you own half the county doesn't mean you have the power to run the rest of us!” Perhaps the biggest change is in Dorothy herself, who is actually a feistier child in the novel than on film. Consider the witch's death. The film stages the event as an accident—Dorothy aims a bucket of water at the burning Scarecrow and douses the witch instead. But the novel makes it no accident. The witch tricks Dorothy and obtains one of her Silver Shoes. Dorothy gets “so very angry that she picked up the bucket of water that stood near and dashed it over the Witch.” Judy Garland's Dorothy is tearfully apologetic; Baum's is outspoken and “angry.”<sup>6</sup>

The screenwriters (Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf ) also expanded the roles of the three companions and turned the Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and Lion into metamorphosed versions of farmhands named Hunk, Hickory, and Zeke. Professor Marvel (Frank Morgan), the genial fraud who watches Dorothy head off as the tornado prepares to descend, reenters her dream vision as the Wizard (as well as, once in the City of Oz, the doorman of the Emerald City, a cabdriver, and the Wizard's guard). These were more than touches of simple psychological realism. Like the technical stroke to shift to color from black and white when Dorothy arrives in Munchkin Land and the suddenly indispensable musical score, these permanent contributions to the Oz mythology are also improvisations that may not necessarily constitute improvements.<sup>7</sup> They blur the clarity of the original, superimposing a second relational network on a clearer original. Dorothy and her companions each lack something and venture to the Emerald City to request it of the Wizard to find it, but in the novel neither the companions nor their deficiencies have reciprocal counterparts in the “real” world of Kansas. Oz is no Purgatory or compensatory educational experience, and it is definitely no metaphor for unconsciousness. Yet the film persuades the audience of a nearly allegorical symmetry between Kansas and Oz and raises unique questions. Is this Dorothy's way of disclosing in dream truths too dangerous or painful to bear while awake? Are the three companions, like the three beasts who temporarily block Dante's entrance to Hell, reflections of flaws in her personality? We don't really know. The movie supplies teasing closures to questions that only it raises. The screenwriters' brilliant adaptation—whether you find it welcome or not—turns each character into a symbolic referent, a point on a carefully plotted postcyclonic rainbow that begins and ends in Kansas. As a result, the film displaces emphasis from fantasy to psychology and makes several “unforgivable” changes.<sup>8</sup> Whatever its justification in commercial or technical terms, the film forces its audience to measure the distance between Kansas and Oz in psychic, not imaginative, terms; it tidies up certain loose ends, such as the origins of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow, each of whose histories is explained in the book, by eliminating the need for explanations. Everything that occurs in the end occurs in Dorothy's mind.

This is an essential point: Baum's Oz, like the Elysian Fields in Greek mythology or

the witch's house in "Hansel and Gretel," is a place you can get to from here. There is no complicated prospectus, more fit for adults than children, of dream projections of waking originals. The text has a serene confidence in its own imaginative conditions that, along with its disquietingly simple style, are its lasting strengths. For those raised on the movie, what is "missing" is surface complexity, density of characterization, and witty dialogue. Baum's prose is clear and childlike and represents an uncompromising attention to plot rather than style, to events over character. It's almost as if children's literature had found in Baum its own Homer, a writer whose straightforward and occasionally pedestrian style is the determined outcome of the oddness of the story he has to tell. You may miss the character overlays of the film and its calculated verbal ironies, derivative of the more sophisticated children's books. You may long for the *closure* you feel when you see Ray Bolger behind the Scarecrow's outlines or hear the Wizard in Professor Marvel's voice.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the novel dispensed with *Wonderland*-ish exits such as Dorothy's coming to at the end or the final tableau where the ensemble, including Professor Marvel, gathers around her bed like a Broadway cast taking a second bow. While the last person to consult in matters of intention is the author, it's noteworthy that Baum's stated purpose was to "please children of today" with "a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out" (p. 3). Simplicity, in other words, was his goal, not stylistic flash or psychological nuance.

For students of popular literature, one of the least appealing features of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its thirteen sequels may be its flat-affect style and its drifting meanings. *Alice in Wonderland* has been the subject of dissertations and a Norton Critical Edition.<sup>10</sup> Barrie's *Peter Pan*, not yet a Norton, was the subject of a famous and still-resonant critical attack; and Barrie, like Carroll/Dodgson, is still a person of intense biographical interest, much of it directed at his suspiciously homoerotic attachment to the Davies boys.<sup>11</sup> Andersen and the Brothers Grimm have attracted as many footnotes as readers. By contrast *The Wizard of Oz*, always clear sailing for children, is the horse latitudes for scholars, with its author's intentions having drained away into the simple medium of his narrative and its oddities petrified into a system of connections that, as Edith Hamilton remarked of Greek myth, is comprehensive but never coherent. Its very simplicity, in fact, has paradoxically been a barrier to using it in education.<sup>12</sup> Yet Dorothy's book remains nonetheless a book Dorothy herself would likely have been able to read—and probably on her own. Generations of readers struggle with Andersen's moral inflexibility and his tendency to punish his female protagonists; they find the Grimm's Fairy Tales as annoyingly elliptical as they find Andersen overwrought; and in both notice a fascination with acts of cruelty and violence. *Alice in Wonderland*, though not violent, is an intensely linguistic construct of wacky wordplay, allusion, and parody that features but really does not include the child. Wendy, like Alice, is ten, but what ten-year-old will understand what *Peter Pan*'s obnoxious narrator is alluding to when he compares Captain Hook to "the Sea-Cook"—or Long John Silver of *Treasure Island*? To get an allusion one must have read as much as the author. The allusive range of any text—whether a children's book or Eliot's *The Waste Land*—is an unspoken measure and reflection of the author's education and the core curriculum of cultural expectations

and values that inform it. More than one reader has asked himself—or his parents—whether protagonists like Alice or Wendy would be able to read the books they are in. Who asks that question about *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*?

The difficulty is not always cognitive. The emotional weather in Andersen, Carroll, and Barrie can be dark, wild, and off-putting. Irony is a cognitive threshold for all readers; for children it can be disabling or off-limits. (Try being sarcastic with even the brightest of five-year-olds and he or she may never forgive you.) Irony is a kind of negative exemplification, where you listen to one thing and hear it twice; it is as though the text were singing in harmony with its own implications. Most of life for most children must come with a script, but irony assumes that you already have one; and in fairy tales, which have traditionally been children's earliest scripted plays, the irony is either structural or nonexistent. But when the Little Mermaid's grandmother tells her that the only way that she can gain a human soul would be for the prince "to love you so much that you were more to him than his father or mother," only those who get the allusion to the marriage ceremony will appreciate the bitter-sweet irony. Tinker Bell's mantraic response of "silly ass" in response to Peter's repeated failure to see that her feelings for him are romantic may inspire a ten-year-old's smile but probably not her recognition. For better or worse, confusion like this never troubles readers of the Oz books, where the prevailing emotional weather is optimistic and the tonalities nearly irony free.

Nearly, but not completely. Frank Baum, who was crazy about puns, filled the book with soft-pedaled double entendres—which, for many of us, is Irony 101. Removing the Scarecrow's head in chapter XVI, the Wizard empties the straw and fills the head "with a measure of bran, which he mixed with a great many pins and needles," and then announces, "Hereafter you will be a great man, for I have given you a lot of bran-new brains" (p. 160). A moment later the Lion says of the pins and needles, "That is proof that he is sharp" (p. 160). Comparing the Tin Woodman to the Scarecrow, Glinda says to the former, "You are really brighter than he is—when you are well polished" (p. 208). Some of Baum's puns are subtler, but not by much, such as the Tin Woodman's declaration in chapter XV that he will "bear all [his] unhappiness without a murmur" (p. 155), which is exactly what you would expect of a character with no heartbeat. Other wordplays are contextual: If you were to ask the brainless Scarecrow the question usually posed to fools—"Were you born yesterday?"—he would have to say yes, because, as he relates in chapter III, he actually *was* born yesterday.

Baum's novel is also a staging area for a form of childproof character irony called the irony of self-betrayal, a dramatic or situational irony that is both childproof and child safe.<sup>13</sup> The obvious example is the brainless Scarecrow's habit of coming up with good ideas. It is he who proposes (in chapter VII, p. 68) the order in which the friends must leap the first chasm, each mounted on the Lion's back. When the Lion asks, "Who will go first?" the Scarecrow explains his reply—"I will"—in splendidly rational terms: "If you found that you could not jump over the gulf, Dorothy would be killed, or the Tin Woodman badly dented on the rocks below. But if I am on your back it will not matter so much, for the fall would not hurt me at all." Moments later, after directing the Tin Woodman to chop down a tree in order to make a bridge across the second chasm so they can escape the pursuing Kalidahs, the Lion remarks, "One

would almost suspect you had brains in your head, instead of straw” (p. 70). Immediately afterward, the Scarecrow again figures out how to send the marauding Kalidahs crashing into the gulf (p. 70) and asks the Queen of the field mice to enlist the aid of her subjects in dragging the Lion from the poppy field (p. 87).

One of the funniest sites for self-contradiction is the heartless Tin Woodman, who is constantly bursting into “tears of sorrow and regret” over this or that violation of the natural order, such as his accidental squashing of a beetle in chapter VI:

“This will serve me a lesson,” said he, “to look where I step. For if I should kill another bug or beetle I should surely cry again, and crying rusts my jaw so that I cannot speak.”

Thereafter he walked very carefully, with his eyes on the road, and when he saw a tiny ant toiling by he would step over it, so as not to harm it. The Tin Woodman knew very well he had no heart, and therefore he took great care never to be cruel or unkind to anything.

“You people with hearts,” he said, “have something to guide you, and need never do wrong; but I have no heart, and so I must be very careful” (pp. 63-64).

The contradictions pile up: The brainless come up with the brainiest ideas, the heartless are supersensitive, and the cowardly admit, courageously, to being a coward (and then perform feats of physical daring). The fact that the absence of a heart actually produces something more profound—intense regard for everything that moves—is completely lost on the Woodman, just as the Scarecrow is clueless when it comes to knowing the real meaning of having brains. All three companions are alike in assuming a transparent relationship between signs and their meanings—brains, heart, and courage—and this, of course, is the book’s running joke: All three already possess what they go looking for. Sheldon Cashdan has supplied probably the best short description of the novel in noting how it “focuses on perceived shortcoming in the self as opposed to excesses.”<sup>14</sup> The operative word there is *perceived*. The thematic center of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, like that of any discovery narrative or rite of passage, is a simple message: Accept yourself for what you are.

## II

The differences between Dorothy and her overseas cousins aside, her story, like Wendy’s and Alice’s, is a version of the heroic quest, from Gilgamesh through Odysseus and Aeneas to Huck Finn, Gully Foyle (the protagonist of Alfred Bester’s science-fiction novel *The Stars My Destination*), and Luke Skywalker.<sup>15</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* is an odyssey redacted for children and an elaboration of misadventures like “Hansel and Gretel” and “The Little Mermaid.” Perry Nodelman has described these as “home-away-home” stories, child-sized versions of Northrop Frye’s *Monomyth*.<sup>16</sup> It is the same story that Western culture has in general outline been telling itself for millennia: Self-knowledge requires physical and emotional self-testing, heroes are often reluctant to answer the call, and at the center of the journey is an encounter with profound truths that connect us with our pasts. In more senses than one, Dorothy’s adventure fits the

description, from her accidental landing in Oz to her reluctant acceptance of her power to her recognition, standing in the Wizard's hall, that not even the lovely Emerald City of Oz can top gray Kansas. Baum's story is a child's meditation on Homer's second great theme, *nostalgia*, and, like Odysseus, whose name means "born for trouble," his protagonist has a last name (Gale) that is a subtle predictor of the event, a tornadic windstorm, that determines her destiny.<sup>17</sup> Alison Lurie has pointed out how women tend to occupy the dominant roles in all the Oz books, another of its similarities, accidental or not, to Homer's *Odyssey*, also dominated by women and traditionally called our great domestic epic.<sup>18</sup>

While the imaginative world of Oz bears a family resemblance to whole libraries of fantasy and adventure, it is hard to identify Baum's principal influences. He so artfully sublimates his sources they seem *sui generis*, reminders of Eliot's remark that bad writers borrow and good writers steal. Some, like the kind Stork, are elements that appear in all children's literature, which features lots of talking animals—the noteworthy exception being Toto, who exemplifies that conundrum of children's literature, the Goofy/Pluto Quandary—that is, why some animals speak and others do not, why Goofy has full command of the language and Pluto, Mickey's dog, can only bark.<sup>19</sup> Some elements of suggestive iconographic value, such as the Wicked Witch's dread of water or the fact that her blood has all dried up, seem easily parsed. Others are less certain. The mark on Dorothy's forehead left by the Good Witch of the North is talismanic, like Achilles' unprotected heel or the more contemporary inheritor of the same idea, the lightning-bolt scar on Harry Potter's brow. Does it also point to the mark made by offended deity to protect Cain from harm and to perpetuate his torment? When Odysseus visits Hell in book 11 of the *Odyssey*, the reason is to get directions home from Tiresias, and, similarly, Dorothy undertakes the trip to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard how to get back to Kansas. Yet Oz is no more Hades than Hades Oz. The bar of iron that the Witch places in the middle of her kitchen floor to trip up Dorothy half works—Dorothy trips and loses one of her Silver Shoes—but also inverts tradition: Bar iron is usually associated with warding off demons, not innocent little girls. The witch has a single cyclopean eye that announces a disturbing union of monstrosity and omniscience (and to some may point to Freemasonry's single eye that appears on U.S. currency). In Greek myth, Hermes wears a cap of wings, and in Baum's Oz Dorothy has a Golden Cap. The Winged Monkeys seem related to neutral instrumentalities of evil authority like the Harpies or Wagner's Valkyrie, but neither of these antecedents is as reasonable or eloquent as Baum's equivalents.<sup>20</sup> The apportionment of real estate in Oz is impressive, with the witches governing regions designated by the four cardinal points. But why did Baum assign positive moral values to north and south and negative to east and west—a literary fact, or accident, that Littlefield would use sixty-four years later when he advanced his famous reading of the book as a political allegory?<sup>21</sup>

Or, again, take those Silver Shoes. They seem to reach back to the Cinderella story but in a not entirely helpful way. Dorothy is not Cinderella—and not only because she is of less than marrying age. Dorothy's home life is comfortable and happy; moreover, all Cinderellas, male or female, are sponsored by some natural agency that functions as a parent surrogate—a fairy godmother, a Mother Holle, the spectral grandmother of

the Little Match Girl, or in derivatives like *Flashdance* or *Rocky*, as the protagonist's aging female dance instructor or his grouchy fight trainer. Every Cinderella is special in the first place, a member of a natural aristocracy who has gone unrecognized by dog-and-cat humanity until Nature intervenes and teaches the world to see beauty with Nature's eyes. This is children's literature's own law of natural selection, which states that no naturally gifted child must ever be forced to suffer for very long either social exploitation, social invisibility, or familial marginality. The Cinderella scenario hardly applies to Dorothy, who is special only *after* she is picked up and set down in Oz. She has a happy home, is only technically "homeless" while in Oz, and has two adoptive parents who love her. She is, moreover, a typical little girl from Kansas whose most precious gift is that she knows it. Her confinement in the castle of the Wicked Witch seems an analogue to Cinderella's situation, but Dorothy does little work and spends part of her time in bitter tears. Each invocation of possible precedent only introduces more alienating distance. Scattered throughout the novel there are many such symbols that seem interpretive dead ends—the fact that white is the witch color, for instance, which inverts the anticipated hierarchy of color-coded values, or that, as we learn in chapter XII, the witch is afraid of the dark. The same is true of so many story elements that their appearances, rather than being iterations of some ancient property of fantastic literature, are really opportunities for Baum to empty them and then fill them with his own American content. Whence the continuing and probably endless parade of allegorical readings of the novel, from Henry Littlefield's to Herblock's famous 1939 cartoon, in which Hitler is cast as the Wicked Witch of the West and Mussolini one of the Flying Monkeys. Baum approached his sources like someone on a shopping spree rather than one conducting a calculated raid.

Perhaps this whimsicality also explains why certain apparently pregnant details lead nowhere, such as the man in the small house Dorothy and her companions stop at on the way to the Emerald City, who "had hurt his leg, and was lying on the couch in a corner" (pp. 94-95), the "seven passages and three flights of steps" (pp.104-105) through which Dorothy is led on the way to her room in the Palace, or the fact that the Wizard charges them to come to his Throne Room "at four minutes after nine o'clock" in the morning (p. 148). Was Baum preparing some role for the character with the bad leg that he either forgot about or failed to find a place for? Was one of his children, perhaps, born at 9:04 A.M.? Or are these details simply forgivable inconsistencies, like the behavior of the Tin Woodman, who is moved to tears when he accidentally steps on a bug yet slays a wildcat and forty wolves, or that Dorothy is suddenly found to be wearing a whistle "that she had always carried about her neck since the Queen of the Mice had given it to her" (p. 140), when, in fact, this never happened?

Baum's use of colors is particularly intriguing. There were initially four witches, and by the end of chapter III only one bad one, the Witch of the West, is left. (Should we make anything of the fact that by her very arrival in Oz Dorothy instantly tips the balance in favor of the good and dresses in a frock of white, the witch color, and blue?) Green, the color of the Emerald City, has a persistently ambiguous value in literature, a two-headed semantic arrow that points in opposite or divergent directions. While it gestures to nature and to the appealing presence of natural forces, like nature itself it can possess a malign, counter-Wordsworthian aspect. In *Gawain and the Green*