



Oz in Perspective: Magic and Myth in the L. Frank Baum Books

Richard Tuerk

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When moviegoers accompany Dorothy through the gates of the Emerald City, they may think they have discovered all there is to see of Oz--but as real friends of the Wizard know, more lies behind the curtain. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, on which the 1939 film was based, was only the first of 14 Oz books. Together these works constitute a series rich in allusions to a broad range of literary traditions, including fairy tale, myth, epic, the picaresque novel, and visions of utopia. Reflecting on L. Frank Baum's entire series of full-length Oz books, this study introduces readers to the great folklorist who created not only Dorothy and friends, but countless wonderful characters who still await discovery. Close analysis of each book invites readers to search Baum's fascinating stories for meaning and mythical quality. Progressing chronologically through the canon, the author discusses literary devices and important thematic implications in each book, arguing that Baum wrote for the pleasure of both children and adults, both to provide entertainment and to teach moral lessons. Of particular significance is the argument, sustained over several chapters, that Baum modeled his Oz books on classic mythical patterns, rewriting Oz history in nearly every book to produce a different set of backgrounds and a different conception of utopia for his imaginary kingdom. This variety of backgrounds and archetypes gives Baum's books a truly universal appeal. Examinations of his non-Oz books and his other Oz works, such as Little Wizard Stories of Oz and The Woggle-Bug Book, illuminate the discussion of the Oz novels.

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