

Fantasy and Wonder in Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

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Abstract : Fantasy is a genre that mainly deals with non-realistic literature. Also there exists what is called realistic literature. In realistic literature the world is depicted according to our natural laws. However, in non-realistic literature there is a break from man's vision of reality. The other sub genres of fantasy literature are fables, fairy tales, myths and legends, and fantasy has borrowed many traits from other genres. The fantasy genre is divided into two major classifications, viz. high fantasy and low fantasy. But even in the most brutal of the series, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum's villainy rarely possess the dread so characteristic of European old stories. Baum perceived that drama derives from menace, and there are numerous perils to be overcome in the *Oz* books. What recognizes his stories from those of most of his antecedents is that he never introduced such unpleasant details as unnecessary didactic devices. While he didn't make these stories to embody some fearsome moral, Baum's work is constantly moral.

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L. Frank Baum's Oz series is considered to be the classic American fairy tale and it occupies a great place in literature. He had an aspiring, audacious plan for a new children's book. In his introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* Baum explains that his purpose in writing this work is to introduce: "A series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. (7)

In his childhood, he found didacticism in most of the children's books which creates boredom and the moral principles argued are in the most terrifying and fearsome terms. Baum's book is innovative and he writes his children's fantasy solely to give pleasure to children of today. Fantasy literature has become an extremely popular phenomenon. Many readers are fascinated by fantasy because it contains mystiques, enchantment and the supernatural. Fantasy is a genre that has borrowed different rudiments from other genres. One of the genres that is related to fantasy is fairy tales. Beside fairy tales, myths take a prominent place as they are ancestors of fantasy. Though fantasy literature is unrealistic, one cannot consider it childish. It gives allowances for criticizing the world man lives in and represents both the good and bad sides of mankind by reflecting and contrasting reality. Ultimately the purpose of learning fantasy is for criticizing, entertaining and showing to the reader the different aspects of life. From time immemorial, fantasy has been delighting us.

In the past, fairy tales were the means of making the society to live in a harmonious manner and they could be handled by anyone without any regard to age or social status. But as time has passed by, the society is in the grip of materialism and fairy tales have become children's literature. They are not only entertaining but also cultivating children to learn about moral values. Fairy tales bring delight, and also they give solace to the children to escape from the vagaries of life. In 1975 Bettelheim published *The Uses of Enchantment—the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. According to him, children require recognition and cheerfulness. Life is confusing and the child needs help to understand and manage with the challenges of life. Fairy tales provide the children with pleasure and entertainment. The fantasy in the past had been regarded as children's literature, however, adult fantasy started to emerge, and fantasy for adults tried to create its way in the world, and indeed, children's fantasy grew strong. Traditional fantasies, fairy tales and myths have grown much today and the fantasy genre addresses the concern of the society and it continues to be motivated.

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according to our natural laws. However, in non-realistic literature there is a break from man's vision of reality. The other sub genres of fantasy literature are fables, fairy tales, myths and legends, and fantasy has borrowed many traits from other genres. The fantasy genre is divided into two major classifications, viz. high fantasy and low fantasy. These two criteria are interconnected. In the low fantasy, the setting is in the primary world and in the high fantasy; it is in the secondary world. The world of high fantasy is filled with witches, dwarfs and mythical creatures. They are the natural habitants. In fact, fantasy is a difficult genre, and the term is so critical that there is no agreement on an exact definition of it. Fantasy is not static, it keeps on evolving, and this is the reason why it is hard to arrest fantasy in a definition.

Baum falls in line with other great writers of fairy tales like George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll, and J. R. R. Tolkien. He is considered to be a part of the great tradition. Baum published his first book for children, a collection of stories entitled *Mother Goose in Prose* in 1897. The final story in this collection concerns a little girl named Dorothy, who, lives in a pastoral ambience, vaguely American landscape. She has a magical meet with a rabbit who tells her of his adventures in the castle of Santa Claus. It is a slight tale, and it is significant within the context of the book as it is one of the stories that have a recognizable American ambience. As Baum has a unique way of looking at the world around him, America in his stories can never again be a country without magic. Whenever he looks at the settled areas of the northeast, the flourishing Midwest City of Chicago, the frontier towns of the Dakota Territory, the endless prairie of Kansas and Iowa, the American deserts, or the Mediterranean-like paradise of Southern California, his imagination is filled with magic and great delight. He places wizards in the cities, magic on the prairie, and faeries in the forests, oceans, and skies. Baum also gives a sense of wonder to the children by doing these things, and as Attebery puts forth, "a new freedom of the imagination" (153).

Baum is able to experience America in variety and depth more than most of the people of his generation. He traveled far and wide and in America he toured from New York City to Los Angeles. During his travel, he took up different assignments. He was an actor in New York, a store keeper and newspaper publisher in a frontier town, a traveling salesman throughout most of the Midwest, a magazine editor in Chicago, and a film producer in Hollywood. The development of his fantasy world reflects directly or indirectly his encounters with America. According to Humphrey Carpenter *The Wizard of Oz* is a "subversive tale."

Only with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* published in the first year of the new century, did the United States produce a fantasy which, like its great British

counterparts, examined society critically in fairy story terms. Baum's was an isolated voice.... America was still possessed with the kind of optimism that had infected British society around the time of the Great Exhibition; and optimistic societies do not, apparently, produce great fantasies. (16)

The prospects of optimistic societies that are pleased with themselves have no reason to look for an "Arcadia" or a "Good Place" (17). Baum accepts the discoveries and inventions of his day. They appear as much like fairy tales to him as his own stories, and he has incorporated many of them into his own tales, mixing magic and machines in a way that had not been done before.

Baum believes in dreams and imaginations. He asserts that they "are likely to lead to the betterment of the world" (13). His imagination enables him to look at the earlier innovative inventions and their future uses and misuses. His insight has forced him to realize that the spirit of man has not kept pace with technological progress. This conclusion makes him to come out with the modern children's books which are startlingly modern. Themes such as the spoiling of the earth's environment, the protection of man's freedom in a technological age, the fearsome emphasis on destruction rather than creation, and the inability of man to control some of the forces around him are common in his books. Baum is fond of telling stories to children and whenever he comes in contact with children, he entertains them with stories. This attracted his mother-in-law who advised on him to write children's book. Thus his career as America's most loved children's fantasy writer is almost an accident but it flourished well as he took up writing seriously. Baum could not publish his first book for children until he was forty-one years.

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a cyclone sweeps Dorothy and her dog Toto from Kansas to the Land of Oz. The Good Witch of the North Glinda thanked Dorothy as her house had fallen on the Wicked Witch of the East killing her. The Good Witch directs Dorothy to follow the Yellow Brick Road in order to go to the Emerald City with the hope that its ruler, the Wizard, may help Dorothy find her way to home. Wearing the silver shoes of the Wicked Witch, Dorothy starts her journey. Glinda, the Good Witch, implants a kiss on Dorothy's forehead as a symbol of protection for her during the journey. On the way, Dorothy meets three characters who accompany her on her journey. They are Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and Cowardly Lion.

The Scarecrow desires a brain, the Tin Woodman wants a heart, and the Cowardly Lion lacks courage. They all join together to meet the Wizard with the hope that the Wizard can fulfil their desires. On the way they encounter many adventures. When they meet the Wizard, he inspects them individually and agrees to

grant their requests if they consent to kill the Wicked Witch of the West. On their journey, they encounter additional hostile minor creatures like Honey bees, Kalidahs and flying Monkeys. When Dorothy plans to destroy the Wicked Witch, the Wicked Witch of the West captures and enslaves her. However, Dorothy destroys the Witch with a bucket of water. As a result, Winged Monkeys, who were enslaved by the Wicked Witch, were freed. It was a good gesture Dorothy had shown them and so they helped her by obeying her commands.

The Wizard, a balloonist, is successful in fulfilling the desires of Dorothy's companions. He constructs a balloon to carry Dorothy home. However, the balloon flies with the Wizard before Dorothy gets in. She visits Glinda, the Good Witch of the South. Glinda tells Dorothy that her silver shoes have got the magical power to take her home. She is immediately transported to the Kansas prairie.

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