



L. Frank Baum
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

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THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

LYMAN FRANK BAUM was born in Chittenango, New York, 15 May 1856, seventh and last child of Cynthia Stanton and Benjamin Ward Baum. Frank Baum became in turn a reporter, newspaper editor, salesman, partner and superintendent of a family owned business, and a theatre manager, writer, and actor. The book, music, and lyrics of a musical comedy, *The Maid of Arran* (1882), became his first success; he played the lead and acted as stage director. He married Maud Gage, daughter of feminist Matilda Gage, in 1882. In 1886 Baum published *The Book of the Hamburgs*, a treatise about chickens. In 1888 the Baums moved to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where Baum ran a variety store and took over a weekly newspaper, and then to Chicago. In 1897 he founded a monthly magazine for window dressers, *The Show Window*, and wrote his first children's book, *Mother Goose in Prose*, the first book illustrated by Maxfield Parrish. These were followed by a book of verse and *Father Goose, His Book* (1899), illustrated by William Wallace Denslow. The following year, *The Army Alphabet*, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*, *The Navy Alphabet*, *A New Wonderland*, and *The Songs of Father Goose* (music by Alberta Hall) appeared, and (with Denslow), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), an instant success. Five more children's books followed before *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904). Baum wrote over twenty more children's books under his own name, including twelve more about Oz, and over twenty-five children's books under pseudonyms, a few potboilers for adults, and forty-four more plays, including a hit musical, *The Wizard of Oz* (1902), five more plays based on Oz books, and six motion picture scenarios. In the early 1900s the Baums moved to California and settled in Hollywood, where Baum died in May 1919.

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L. FRANK BAUM

*The Wonderful
Wizard of Oz*

WITH PICTURES BY
W. W. DENSLOW



Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
SUSAN WOLSTENHOLME

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INTRODUCTION

IN a presentation copy to his sister of his first book for children, *Mother Goose in Prose* (1897), L. Frank Baum wrote: 'To please a child is a sweet and lovely thing that warms one's heart and brings its own reward. I hope my book will succeed in that way—that the children will like it.'¹

By contrast, in 1952, illustrator Nicolas Mordvinoff, a Caldecott Medal winner, spoke disparagingly of children's books that sought to 'please': 'To please on the surface is no more than to attract attention by a bright display in the window of an empty store.' Mordvinoff went on to say: 'It is a form of treachery. Art is life and life is no candy.'²

Such statements suggest a certain tension in the cultural definition about what 'children's literature' ought to be, and certain suspicions as well, if we attend to the metaphors here. In addition to a spatial metaphor, where 'art' is imagined to lie 'below' a 'surface' of instant pleasures, Mordvinoff invokes two other metaphors: the first from the world of advertising; the second referring to food.

¹ Cited by Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye, *The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957), 42. This became the epigraph and the source for the title of Baum and MacFall's biography of L. Frank Baum (see n. 7 below).

² Cited by Selma G. Lanes, *Down the Rabbit Hole: Adventures and Misadventures in the Realms of Children's Literature* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 113.

'Candy', associated with treachery and surfaces, is associated here with merchandising, as opposed to that art which is life and implicitly nourishment—moral pap for the young, perhaps, to use Louisa May Alcott's term for her most famous novel, *Little Women*. Such terms suggest a puritanical suspicion of pleasure—in food as well as in reading, and suspicion of business practices as well. They instruct consumers to suspect what they want to have, as they admonish readers to read with mistrust of easy gratification.

Mordvinoff was speaking in general terms, and a half-century after Baum. But if we juxtapose his statement with what we know of the life of Baum, with what Baum wrote about his own mission as a writer, and with Baum's most famous book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, we begin to see that Baum establishes precisely the opposite cultural understanding of books for children. Immediately popular, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* clearly did 'please on the surface', while it was long ignored by critics of children's literature. Published as the new century was born, looking towards that century's preoccupations with technology and its effect on consumer capitalism, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has come to enact its own concerns. Originally attracting attention as a book, turned into at least two hit Broadway musicals and several films, one of which has taken on its own cultural life, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* itself has become a window dressed to lure its reader-audience with the glitz of twentieth-century American culture, precisely because its author believed in pleasing on the surface. Its reception and cultural position, subsequent history and independent life, came to echo its implicit preoccupations.

Historians have commented on the shift during the

second half of the nineteenth century from production to consumption, from industrial capitalism to consumer capitalism by the century's end.³ Caught between the two modes, Baum intuited consumer capitalism and implicitly described it, though his understanding of the shape his own career might take was formed by nineteenth-century industry. Although what we know about his interest in politics suggests that he did support reform, he was no revolutionary; he himself followed the course of the system, even anticipating its vicissitudes, and worked for success in conventional terms. His best-known work suggests ambivalence towards this system and undercuts the belief that it promotes. Finally, his very hope in the culture he described points to its limits and problems.

Baum's career as well as his most characteristic work flaunted and advertised the idea that tempting sweets should be on display to entice readers as consumers. Baum became a man of letters as a man of business, to use a phrase coined by novelist W. D. Howells—not as an alternative. And the idea of attracting attention 'by a bright display in the window of an empty store' would not have seemed like such a bad thing to Baum. For having been through a variety of careers with limited success, it was first as a decorator of shop windows, and finally as the author of books that would please a mass audience, even though attracting little positive attention from critics, that he would at last make his fortune.

Only in America, and probably only in the America of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, could one

³ For example, see Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 18.

pursue such a career as Baum's. His was a life of luck, wits, and the rising or falling fortunes of the capitalist economy, into which he inserted himself in various roles: as partner in a family business, producer of 'Baum's Castorine' (a lubricant for axles), newspaper editor, actor, theatrical producer, manager of 'Baum's Bazaar', travelling salesman of china and glassware. His continuing interest in writing, as in theatre, made it one among other ways of earning a living.

Sometimes Baum's career has been viewed as a series of dead ends until he found his 'true' career, writing for children. I think that is a mistake, for in fact he had some success in almost everything he tried. Perhaps this is a question about whether his glass was half-empty or half-full. Even as a writer, Baum's success was only partial: he never repeated the achievement of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and at the end of his life was driven to writing more Oz books than he wanted in order to support himself, instead of investing his energy in other writing.

In Bradford, Pennsylvania, he worked on a weekly newspaper, the *Era*. His greatest early theatrical success, *The Maid of Arran*, played for a week in New York and went on the road, appearing during its tour in Baum's upstate New York hometown, Syracuse. His interests, as well as his success and failure, followed those of the nation. Baum's father had founded the family fortune by skimming oil in Pennsylvania before becoming a banker in central New York; and Baum tried his luck there too, with his theatre company. In 1888, along with so many other Americans, Baum went west. In Aberdeen, South Dakota, his entrepreneurial pluck kept his family going, now with a wife and eventually four sons, for four more years.

Businesses do of course falter, particularly in an economy experiencing frequent boom-or-bust cycles. Due to a series of family problems and a fire, his theatrical company folded; the economy of Aberdeen finally could not support his variety store; he took over a newspaper formerly run by a friend, and that too failed. In fact, when he had sought to marry Maud Gage of Fayetteville, New York, her mother, prominent feminist Matilda Gage, had objected to her daughter's marrying Baum, then in the midst of his theatrical career. For Matilda Gage, usually a shrewd woman, that may have been one of her few bad judgments. What is remarkable is that in one way or another, Baum always landed on his feet. Like the Wizard he would later create—and who has often been read as a surrogate for himself—he would get blown off-course only to land in another valley, a greener and more fertile one. It may be impossible to decide whether Baum's buoyant optimism, so apparent in his books, and his unrelenting faith in the American system and economy, even to its consumerism, were cause or effect of his remarkable success. Such optimism most likely testifies to what late nineteenth-century American culture must have trained him to see as the natural prerogative of a man of his circumstances, born to an upper-middle class family: that the country belonged to him coast-to-coast and that if a fortune was lost, another was only to be gained. If Baum was the sort of wizard he eventually would write about, the magical power that fuelled his illusions took the form of an amazing, almost uncanny ability to feel the cultural pulse and to invest his efforts exactly in the areas where American consumer capitalism was headed.

One good move was his choice of place. Not surprisingly

for a turn-of-the-century man of fortune, Chicago was where such fortune began to burgeon. In Chicago Baum conceived the idea of founding a magazine for window-dressers, *The Show Window*. Baum's background, combining skill in writing, merchandising, and theatre, was perfectly suited to this enterprise. Recent criticism has suggested how pertinent Baum's magazine was to his most famous literary work.⁴ Further emphasis should be put on what a remarkable achievement it was in itself. "I conceived of the idea of a magazine devoted to window trimming", Baum told his sister, "which I know is greatly needed and would prosper if ever we would get it together."⁵ He was right. Circulation took off; by the second issue it had swelled to ten thousand.⁶ Baum further boosted his idea for merchandising and for his magazine by founding the National Association of Window Trimmers of America, of which Baum became one of three directors. The magazine was so successful that Baum later put together a volume of articles and illustrations from it, under the title *The Art of Decorating Dry Good Windows and Interiors* (1900).

Clearly Baum had hit on an idea that the blooming capitalist economy welcomed. While he did not invent the

⁴ For discussion of how to understand *The Show Window* in the light of Baum's career, see William R. Leach's introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, American Society and Culture Series (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1991); Stuart Culver, 'What Manikins Want: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*', *Representations*, 21 (1988), 97-116; and Culver, 'Growing Up in Oz', *American Literary History*, 4 (1992), 607-28.

⁵ Leach, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 22.

⁶ Frank Joslyn Baum and Russell P. MacFall, *To Please a Child* (Chicago; Reilly & Lee, 1961), 94.

use of show windows for display, he raised the idea to a new height.⁷ He turned the window into the stage of a theatre and at the same time an advertising tool. The display window as perfected by Baum may well have been among the first, but certainly not the last, important successful attempts of capitalist culture to create need in a mass market by advertising which specifically used drama. Fond of gimmickry and technological tricks, Baum used store windows as little stages for consumer tableaux with moving figures and lights, that anticipated what television would later do to attract attention and to arouse desire. The drama was plotless: the only point was to animate consumer goods, the only 'real' item in an illusion of clever gimcracks that came alive, animated by artistry and technology. For people who looked into the window of Marshall Field's department store, such scenes must have held the same fascination as the Dynamo at the Great Exposition of 1900 had held for Henry Adams, who describes his wonder in *The Education of Henry Adams*; and Baum never invited his audience to ask about the spiritual energy behind such power, as Adams did.⁸

A century later, we may well criticize such unabashed revelling in consumerism in a racially segregated society where women were still disenfranchised and children still worked in mills. But for Baum, a beneficiary of the class

⁷ Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, describes show windows and other advertising during this period. See esp. pp. 189-91. See also Leach, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 22-4, who describes details of Baum's advice for window decorating, as well as suggesting the show window's appeal to consumer desire.

⁸ Culver makes a connection between Baum and Adams through the Colombian Exposition of 1893. See 'What Manikins Want', 105-6.

structure (even though dependent on his own wits), there was no 'treachery' here. Baum's trade journal blurred the boundary lines separating writing, theatre, and merchandising. One became the other as easily as Baum moved from one of these professions to the other: salesmanship became entertainment. And while the show window allows the consumer-audience to admire the technological wizardry behind the scenes, a distancing mechanism that keeps the onlooker a safe distance away, it also invites the onlooker to participate in the fantasy by purchasing what it offers.

Like theatre, writing too depends on the power to catch the imagination and to make the audience-reader believe in what you have created. Writing is both showmanship and salesmanship. In his first children's book, *Mother Goose in Prose*, Baum entertained by 'selling' the contents of the traditional rhymes. The text invites readers into *Mother Goose*, which as verse distances readers by its absurdity, by turning the rhymes into narratives which are almost plausible. While the text is not especially original, it is generally thought to have a certain charm, which consists in making the bizarre language of *Mother Goose*—the very point of the rhymes when they are in verse form—more palatable, easier to swallow. Baum's tales reduce the extravagance of nonsense rhymes to a certain homely possibility and become not just prose but prosaic as they undo the effect of the rhymes themselves. The book had moderate commercial success and went through several reprintings.

His next venture was a picture book, *Father Goose, His Book* (1899), illustrated in colour by William Wallace Denslow whose work is a humorous cross between cartoons and art nouveau. *Father Goose* has its own importance in

the history of children's literature: an original picture book⁹ by an American artist, with original humorous verse by an American writer, possibly the first fully conceived American picture book, where text and illustrations were imagined together and produced to suit each other; in full colour, moreover—a chancy and unusual venture in a children's book. Publisher George M. Hill was sufficiently wary of the cost to insist that Baum and Denslow pay for the plates. As for Baum and Denslow, they had enough confidence in the merits of their product to manage, on their shoestring budget, to have the verses hand-lettered on to the pages at a very low price.¹⁰ But they stuck with their original plan for a picture book in colour. The response of the American public suggested that once again Baum had hit on an idea whose time was at hand. In less than a month the first edition sold out; during its first year over 100,000 copies were printed; and in June 1900 it was reported to have had the largest sale of any children's book in America for that year. Later, after the success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum acknowledged the importance to his career of his earlier book by naming the Baums' new summer cottage on Lake Michigan 'The Sign of the Goose'.

From the outset, however, Baum's work remained outside established children's literature, a fact often protested about by *Oz aficionados*.¹¹ *Father Goose* was well received

⁹ I am using the term 'picture book' as distinct from 'illustrated book', as it is often used by historians and critics of children's literature—to suggest a book where pictures and text tend to be weighted equally, and where each page is accompanied by a picture.

¹⁰ See Baum and MacFall, *To Please a Child*, 100–1, who also report the sales statistics reported below.

¹¹ See e.g. *The Annotated Wizard of Oz*, introd. Michael Patrick Hearn (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1973), 76–7.

by the critics when it came out. But it is never cited in histories of the picture book today, where critics and historians note the popularity of such British illustrators as Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, and Walter Crane, even in the United States. The few American artists who are remembered today, such as Howard Pyle, tended to choose stories and scenes from European traditions.

The same pattern of commercial success and critical neglect marked the reception of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, when it appeared the year after *Father Goose*. Baum explicitly stated its purpose in his introduction: 'solely to pleasure children of today', who seek 'only entertainment' in wonder tales. The response of the public was immediate. In its first five months the first edition, also printed by George Hill, was reprinted four times, for a total of 90,000 copies. The success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* assured Baum's future as a writer of books for children, and in 1902 he sold *The Show Window* magazine. He soon wrote other books for children. His *American Fairy Tales* and half a dozen other children's books appeared in the next five years. But children clamoured for more books about Oz, and Baum responded in 1904 with *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. Twice he tried to write an end to the series into the books, but his readers would not allow it. Eventually he went on to write a dozen more Oz books, in addition to other books for children, plays, and books for adults.

As in *Father Goose*, Baum's choice of Denslow as his illustrator was as inspired as the text itself as a selling point for the book. Baum's sense of humour suited Denslow's style, and that style suited his text. Baum and Denslow imagined *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, like *Father Goose*, in full

colour. Denslow's work may well have influenced Baum's text as it was being written. Like *Father Goose*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was imagined not only as a literary text, but as a material entity, with its own design and substance. Possibly because of the striking appearance and success of their earlier collaboration, Baum and Denslow built the colour imagery of the text into the production of the book itself. The first chapters of the Hill editions of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are illustrated in a greyish sepia; as Dorothy moves to the blue Munchkinland, the illustrations become blue; the chapters about the Emerald City are green; the land of the Winkies is depicted in yellow; Glinda's southern country is illustrated in red. Certainly the concept of the book as a whole, pictures and text, aided its original success.¹² Once again, Baum was moving with the currents of American culture, in both his idea of an American fantasy and in his conception of a cartoonishly illustrated book in colour.

In 1902 *The Wizard of Oz* became a hit Broadway musical, with script by Baum, in the tradition of the British Christmas pantomime, one of the great theatrical successes of the early twentieth century. Its success would influence other musical productions, such as Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland* (1903). The script was said to

¹² As with *Father Goose*, the colour illustrations greatly increased the cost of production of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. There is some dispute as to how that cost was handled. Baum and MacFall, *To Please a Child*, report that, as with the earlier book, Denslow and Baum shared the cost of production. But Hearn disputes this in his introduction to *The Annotated Wizard* (p. 28). On Denslow's responsibility for the book's success, see Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard*, 33-44, *passim*. Denslow's tendency to take credit may have led to the break between the two, after their next collaboration, *Dot and Tot of Merryland* (1901).

be lifeless and the music uninspired; but as in the show windows that Baum had imagined and written about, special effects created a fantasyland: a cyclone, a snowstorm to awaken Dorothy in the poppyfield, a magic show.¹³ *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was really a natural for a Broadway musical comedy. Although the book had to be radically changed, at least two of the characters already had their theatrical correspondents: the Scarecrow and the Tin Man were a vaudeville team which, played by Fred A. Stone and David Montgomery, stole the show. Baum had once again anticipated the desires of the public when he brought his book to life as a Broadway musical.

Later in his career Baum's wizardry appeared to have failed him; later musical adaptations were less successful. Unable to recapture his former success, he began to lose money, and finally declared bankruptcy in 1911. But some of his problems were due to ideas which had not really run aground but were simply ahead of the popular current. During a trip to Paris Baum, always fascinated by technology, grew interested in the film industry there and in trick photography, as developed by George Méliès; and in 1907-8 Baum produced a series of films to advertise his books.¹⁴ Calling them 'Radio Plays', he went on a lecture tour with them. Descriptions of them sound amazingly like some of Walt Disney's special effects in such films as *Fantasia* and in his television shows:

A closed book is first shown, which the fairies open. On the first page is disclosed a black and white picture of little Dorothy. . . .

¹³ See details reported by Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard*, 49, who notes its impact on later musicals.

¹⁴ See *ibid.* 51-4.

I beckon, and she straightway steps out of its pages, becomes imbued with the colors of life and moves about. The fairies then close the book, which opens again and again until the Tin Man, Scarecrow and all the others step out of the pages and come, colored, to life.¹⁵

While the Radio Plays received good reviews and good audiences, they lost money; and Baum had invested heavily in them. But Baum retained his interest in film. Once again, either chance or, perhaps, Baum's uncanny ability to move with the flow of popular interest had put him in the right place. The Baums had moved to California, finally settling about 1910 in the sleepy little town of Hollywood. Baum and a group of friends—composer Louis F. Gottschalk, actors, businessmen involved with the nascent film industry—organized a club, the Lofty and Exalted Order of Uplifters; and Baum proposed that they establish a film company, the Oz Film Manufacturing Company. In 1914 the company produced a five-reel version of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*; and it went on to produce five other films, two of them about Oz.

Eventually, of course, the public did become entranced by the world of Oz on the big screen. But here again, Baum was ahead of his time. In Hollywood a limited number of film-makers already had control of the distribution of film; legal battles would decide who would gain control of the industry. While Paramount Pictures eventually agreed to distribute the Oz films, Baum could not avoid litigation. And just as the Hill company had expressed its doubts about production costs for children's

¹⁵ Cited *ibid.* 52, from an interview in the *New York Herald*, 26 Sept. 1909.

books (which Baum and Denslow had proved unfounded), so too did theatres fear that cinema patrons would not pay for films for children. A few years later the time for films for children did finally arrive, with a more successful film company venturing into an animated musical version of 'Snow White', a tale Baum had imagined presenting on the musical stage. Such a venture moved Disney Studios into the position of an American institution. But for Baum before the First World War there was no such success; the company folded, and the studio was sold to Universal.¹⁶

Baum also thought of creating a marvellous theme park based on Oz on an island off the coast of California—the show window made large as life and inviting the onlooker into the show. If Baum anticipated Disney yet again in imagining a Magic Kingdom, Disneyland resembles Oz in that both are finally reflections of the commercial society that produced them. But for Baum the problem was that, while his artistic ideas grew into twentieth-century media, he was still a businessman of the nineteenth century. Clearly, the roles of artist and businessman, which had run together earlier in Baum's career, were beginning to diverge.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz received some favourable attention from critics when it first appeared; but, in spite of the book's popular success, neglect and negative comments followed. The book was often thought to be poorly written; and in the next half-century its status as literature

¹⁶ In 1925, six years after Baum's death, Chadwick Pictures filmed *The Wizard Of Oz*. The film was not a great success, and is notable chiefly because Oliver Hardy, who had not yet teamed up with Stan Laurel, played the Tin Woodman. On Baum's resemblance to Disney, see also Jerry Griswold, 'There's No Place But Home: *The Wizard of Oz*', *Antioch Review*, 45/4 (1987), 462–75.

remained uncertain at best. The problem may have involved the production of the text as well as its literary merit. Baum's books might have received more positive attention had they been published by a major eastern publisher instead of a small Chicago firm.¹⁷ Baum was suffering the same frustration with his books that he later endured with films: the small producer could no longer compete against those who controlled big industry.

But he always retained a popular, almost cultish following. In 1957 the International Wizard of Oz Club created its own fanzine, *The Baum Bugle*; and later, some of the best work on Baum was produced by grown-up children who had been 'pleased' by Baum, such as Michael Patrick Hearn, who began his work on *The Annotated Wizard of Oz* while a 20-year-old student.¹⁸ But also during the 1950s the director of the Detroit public library proudly stated that his libraries had never stocked any of Baum's books.¹⁹ New reasons for banning the book keep surfacing; in the mid-1980s Christian fundamentalists in Tennessee sought to ban *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.²⁰ While the fundamentalists' objection to 'good witches' may seem patently ridiculous to those who do not share their beliefs, they may be sensing a philosophy behind the text which is

¹⁷ See Martin Gardner, 'Why Librarians Dislike Oz', in *The Wizard of Oz*, ed. Hearn (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 187-91.

¹⁸ See Geraldine DeLuca and Roni Natov, 'Researching Oz: An Interview with Michael Patrick Hearn', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 11/2 (1987), 51-62.

¹⁹ See Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard*, 68. Hearn also notes (p. 75) an essay by critic Stewart Robb, who jokes about a possible political motive for banning the book from the New York Public Library in the 1930s: the book was too socialist and anarchic.

²⁰ *The Washington Post*, 25 Oct. 1986, A1, A7.

alien to them. Theosophy, which attracted Baum and his wife and mother-in-law, was a religion of nature with elements of both the natural and occult sciences and referred often to mother-goddess cults of the past. Baum was not conventionally religious nor did he necessarily believe all the tenets of theosophy, though he and his wife read about it and joined a theosophical discussion group. But the real problem for Christian fundamentalists probably has more to do with the text's secular humanist stance than anything occult.²¹

While some of the neglect of Baum's work may be due to the conditions of the books' publication, as late as 1983 Hearn was complaining that librarians, educators, and the children's literature establishment were still neglecting Baum. Hearn contends that Baum's name still tends to be absent from lists of the best children's books in magazines' Christmas issues, and that *The Horn Book* magazine devotes articles and bibliographies to secondary American writers and ignores Baum. With occasional exceptions, such as critic Edward Wagenknecht's *Utopia Americana*, not until mid-century did *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* begin to attract serious critical attention; and, as with Wagenknecht's essay, that tended to originate in English rather than education departments.

Most recently, the impact of literary theory, which has focused attention on popular culture as well as canonized art, has given impetus to new readings of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Contemporary theory often describes the double movement of language, its tendency to destabilize

²¹ As Culver suggests ('What Manikins Want', 97).

itself—not a bad move for children's literature, where doubleness is suggested in the nature of the genre, which may be understood to operate inversely for adult readers and children. Educators often describe children's literature as a socializing tool—helping an imagined child-reader to become more 'adult'; whereas literary critics tend to discuss its regressive and nostalgic qualities—making its adult readers childlike, for whom fantasy becomes not an escape to be assimilated but rather the very point of reading. Recent theory attends to this double movement, which may be seen as a function of the literature itself, or of reading, or both. And while the tone of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* suggests that the text supports the status quo, theory suggests how to read the text against itself. Such commentary tends to make statements that double back on themselves: for example, that the text exposes the machinery behind enchantment as it celebrates power to enchant; or that while fantasy allows for an escape, the function of that escape is to allow a return to a repressive reality.²² *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* itself invites 'double' reading because of the text's own preoccupation with doubles and dualities: good witches are doubled by bad witches (two of each); the journey to the Wizard is reflected by the journey away from him; the last chapter, set in Kansas, doubles the first; in the second chapter the Good Witch of the North presents Dorothy with the silver shoes, while in the

²² The first of these views is Culver's (ibid. 99); the second, Sarah Gilead's ('Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction', repr. in Peter Hunt (ed.), *Literature for Children* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 80–109. Culver speaks here specifically about the film; but in this instance what he says applies also to the written text.

penultimate chapter the Good Witch of the South reveals their power; Dorothy is twice disappointed by the Wizard.²³

During the first wave of serious Baum criticism in mid-century, an influential essay by Henry Littlefield suggested that the tale symbolically represents its own social context. Littlefield argued that the book could be read as a Populist parable, a political and social allegory. The Populist movement had begun in the 1890s with a coalition of farmers and industrial workers from western and southern states. As the 'People's Party', they advocated government ownership of the railroads and a silver-based currency, put their own men in Congress, and supported William Jennings Bryan, who was also the Democratic candidate, in the 1896 Presidential election. In Littlefield's reading, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman represent, respectively, rural and industrial interests. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* supposedly reveals Baum's support of Bryan, represented by the Lion in the book, and of the silver standard: silver slippers can carry one across a golden road and eventually even across a barren desert. Littlefield's essay itself became a road, which other critics would travel towards ways that the book suggests its socio-economic-political context.²⁴ Baum has been read, for example, as a quasi-socialist reformer whose work subverts the American socialization process based on competition and achievement and recommends instead a feminist utopia.²⁵

By contrast, but also following the line that Littlefield's

²³ Hearn, *The Annotated Wizard*, 76-7.

²⁴ Henry M. Littlefield, 'The Wizard of Oz: A Parable on Populism', *American Quarterly*, 16/1 (1964), 47-58.

²⁵ Such a reading has been offered by Jack Zipes, in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1983; repr. New York: Methuen, 1988), 121-31.

essay suggests, other recent socio-political criticism has attended to ways in which *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* appears to glorify consumer culture.²⁶ Such criticism suggests that the text approvingly thematizes the very conditions that made it such a popular success. The Wizard has built the ultimate consumer city for his people and runs the supreme variety store; he promises Dorothy and her friends their hearts' desire only if they pay him the proper price, the death of the Wicked Witch of the West. Dorothy, read as a surrogate for the consumer, is fixated in the state of desire itself, in front of the show window, while the artist of the window never quite controls the desire he produces.²⁷ In such a reading Baum's text might suggest a critical analysis of its own culture, even though the text itself appears to enjoy it.

Read as an endorsement of cultural consumerism, the text none the less implicitly suggests that its attraction is based on a lie, as such criticism emphasizes. In Oz, unlike the Chicago of Marshall Field's show window, everyone can believe because there are no poor in the Land of Oz. While faith seems to have its own power to make appearances reality, what it confirms is illusory. And the Wizard's power depends on a childish sense of omnipotence.

²⁶ See Leach, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, who also suggests the connection of *The Wizard* to *The Show Window* and consumer culture. Leach, who also reads the Wizard's humbuggery to suggest 'tricksterism' in merchandising, suggests a few reservations that Baum himself expressed; but finally concludes that 'Baum was extremely uncritical of tricksterism' (177). See also Leach's discussion of *The Wizard* as a celebration of technological and economic power to create illusions (178).

²⁷ See Culver, 'What Manikins Want', on *The Wizard*; Culver's essay 'Growing Up in Oz' examines *The Marvelous Land of Oz* with a similar New Historicist approach.

The journey of Dorothy and her friends itself ensures their success; the Wizard must do as they ask because they ask it. "Why should I do this for you?" Oz asks each of the petitioners in turn; and their answers are similar: "Because you are strong and I am weak", responds Dorothy; "Because you are wise and powerful, and no one else can help me", says the Scarecrow; "Because I ask it, and you alone can grant my request", says the Woodman; the Lion's reply is similar. The people of the Emerald City too must find it in their interest to believe that he has done what they must have wished for. The text's implicit approval of mass consumption may be one reason for its enduring popularity: it keeps reassuring its readers of the glories of a land where one is entitled to one's heart's desire.

While Baum may have recognized the 'humbug' implicit in American capitalist culture, such tricksterism appears as benign, even delightful. Humbug becomes a virtue; 'making believe', a way of life, positive and optimistic. A show window might be a fraud, but part of its appeal lay in the trickery itself and in wonder that technology could produce such tricks. When the Wizard is unmasked at the climax of the book, Dorothy and her friends are more amazed than horrified. One plot of traditional 'wonder tales' tells of an evil king who sends off to almost certain destruction a hero whom he fears. (The hero, of course, evades the destruction.) But here, the evil king is neutralized to an eccentric performer, whom readers, identifying with Dorothy and the people of Oz, are invited to regard affectionately: "When he was here he built for us this beautiful Emerald City, and now he is gone he has left the Wise Scarecrow to rule over us" (p. 207).

If humbug is here, it resides in the tale itself, which

ensures adventure against danger. Dorothy is protected and can come to no real harm. The Wizard is a seductive salesman because he is a showman, a circus performer from Omaha, who has taken on a new role, with new costumes and amazing special effects: a lovely lady, a ball of fire, a giant head. If he reminds readers of circus showman P. T. Barnum, who also promoted 'humbug', that is the role of Baum himself, whom the Wizard represents. And even though the Wizard establishes distance between himself and his audience, the show he runs furthers the adventures of Dorothy and her friends by suggesting that they really can participate in the fantasy he creates, just as the show window invites participation. The text itself does the same. The Wizard's invitation to Dorothy and her friends doubles the text's invitation to the reader to participate in the fantasy, through identification with Dorothy. Dorothy is especially easy to identify with because she is so broadly sketched; like the protagonist of a fairy-tale, she is little more than the marker of a place in the story, as a stand-in for the reader. This sketchiness of character, which may be one of the qualities critics have disliked in the text, actually makes it more available.

But how are we to understand this invitation in the light of the ending of the tale? While the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion receive their hearts' desire through believing in the fantasy, Dorothy cannot. And her inability to step over that line sends the Wizard off by himself and leaves her to find another way home. In the text, that return is positive, what was wanted all along. Why?

If there is a critical crux in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, it is the ending. Salman Rushdie is not alone in finding

the sentiment that 'there's no place like home' to be the least convincing idea in the film, which is about the joys of going away.²⁸ In the book that line is given a less prominent location than in the film: it occurs not at the ending but in a conversation between Dorothy and the Scarecrow, shortly after Dorothy meets him (p. 44). But the book, where we find that Oz was no dream as it is in the film, poses the same problem. How can we keep young girls down on the farm after they have seen Paree? Why should we want to?

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. (p. 10)

Why should Dorothy want to return to such a place?

Psychological readings have made the most sense of the narrative's frame story. In psychological terms, the return suggests Dorothy's ability to incorporate fantasy into the reality she must encounter.²⁹ What merits further attention is that Dorothy's story recaptures some of the elements of

²⁸ Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 23.

²⁹ Psychological and psychoanalytic readings are suggested by Griswold ('There's No Place But Home'); Osmond Beckwith, 'The Oddness of Oz' (repr. in *The Wizard of Oz*, ed. Hearn, 233-46); and Sarah Gilead ('Magic Abjured').

the narrative Sigmund Freud recounts in his paper on 'Family Romances'—an essay that suggests the significance of fantasy. As Freud explains, a child comes to feel that he is actually a step-child or an adopted child as a result of hostile impulses toward his parents.³⁰ His imagination tells him that he is actually the offspring of a more exalted family; his 'real' parents may be kings and queens, for example.

The wonder tales that Baum invoked in his short Introduction tell the psychological truth of the family romance. 'Cinderella', for example, implies at the outset that the protagonist transcends not only the ashes where she is forced to sit but also her family. She is a princess, superior to her stepsisters by virtue of her kindness and beauty, even before she receives her fairy godmother's gifts; and her marriage to the prince only fulfils her natural destiny. Dorothy is that same princess, heir to more than what her immediate circumstances imply. She lives not with her parents but with an elderly aunt and uncle with whom she does not properly fit, in a land in which she and her little dog do not belong: 'When Dorothy, who was an orphan, first came to her, Aunt Em had been so startled by the child's laughter that she would scream and press her hand upon her heart whenever Dorothy's merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the little girl with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at' (p. 10). As for Uncle Henry, he 'never laughed. He worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was' (p. 11).

³⁰ As Beckwith notes: 'In no other American children's books . . . do there seem to be so many orphans as in the *Oz* books' ('The Oddness of *Oz*', 241).

Eventually, in a later book in the series, Baum would carry out the logic implied by Dorothy's displacement by bringing Dorothy to live in Oz permanently, where she does become a princess. In order not to burden her with guilt in leaving her parent-substitutes, she brings Aunt Em and Uncle Henry with her. But the problem in this first book is that Dorothy rejects the land to which she properly belongs.

In the fairy-tale, the ending suggests that the protagonist has moved beyond childhood to adult sexuality, signified by the marriage of the prince and princess and their 'happy ever after' life. Psychoanalytic readings of fairy-tales have suggested that such tales reassure their child-readers that their conflicting and unacceptable desires will be managed and properly resolved.³¹ But *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* fails to follow the path of the traditional wonder tale, even though it hints at some of the same psychological realities.

In his Introduction, Baum claims to provide 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'. Readers have often pointed out that not only terror and horror, but also love and marriage are left out of his tales. The special 'Americanness' of Baum's tales has been generally understood in terms of its use of homely American details (such as scarecrows

³¹ Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Knopf, 1976) is the book which has codified psychoanalytic readings of fairy-tales. Though Bettelheim has been widely criticized, his suggestions about the psychological truth that fairy-tales tell are still generally assumed as a starting-point in many readings.

and cornfields) or of Oz's resemblance to American geography (Dorothy moves westward; Chicago is the Emerald City; its four quarters resemble the east, west, south, and north of North America), or of its reflection of the American economy and politics, or of its recapitulation of themes of other American classics (such as *Huckleberry Finn*, whose homelessness resembles Dorothy's).³² But another 'American' quality is its puritan refusal to acknowledge sexuality. As Henry Adams suggests in *The Education of Henry Adams*, in American culture sex is not strength but sin, replaced by the force of the machine, the Dynamo, as Baum too implies.

Unlike Cinderella, or Snow White, or Sleeping Beauty, or so many other wonder-tale protagonists, Dorothy does not move towards marriage and adult sexuality, but back to the grey world of Kansas and to her unsatisfactory parent-substitutes. Further, the text fails to offer any adult models. If Oz is an idyllic world, it is so because of its idealization of innocence. As critics have suggested, a child's sense of ethics prevails: deceptions that do not harm anyone are forgivable; malice and bad nature are wrong. Oz is a child-world, where children dominate and the child's point of view is the perspective from which things are seen. Though supposed to be adults, the Munchkins are the same size as Dorothy. Dorothy's companions the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman can be read as children in costume. The Scarecrow has only recently been 'born'; and the Tin Woodman is what he is because he has been rendered unable to engage in adult love. The Cowardly

³² Griswold outlines the last two of these ('There's No Place But Home', 463).