



Oz and Beyond: The Fantasy World of L. Frank Baum

Michael O. Riley

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Long before Judy Garland sang "Over the Rainbow", the denizens of Oz had already captivated the American reading public. The quintessential American fairy tale, L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" has had a singular influence on our culture since it first appeared in 1900. Yet, as Michael Riley shows, Baum's achievement went far beyond this one book, or even the 13 others he wrote about that magic kingdom. The Land of Oz was just one in a whole continent of fantasy countries whose histories, geographies and citizens Baum developed in detail over the course of his writing career. In this "Other-world", Baum created a full-scale mythology that foreshadowed Tolkien's Middle Earth in its imaginative detail. Taking us on an entertaining tour of this endearing and unforgettable Other-world, Riley illuminates Baum's richly creative imagination in the Oz books and other works of fantasy, like the much neglected "Life and Adventures of Santa Claus". He restores for many readers Baum's original conception of Oz as it existed long before other writers were hired to continue the immensely popular series following Baum's death in 1919. Equally important, he shows us how Oz and its companion countries evolved over time, as Baum repeatedly responded to a loyal readership clamouring for an endless supply of Oz stories. While there have been other studies of Baum, this is the one that examines his Other-world in its entirety. "Oz and Beyond" provides a comprehensive analysis of all of Baum's fantasy creations and his evolution as a fantasy writer, demonstrating that Baum had a more consistent and disciplined imagination than is generally recognized. It also explains the influence of Baum's childhood and adult experiences on his writing and illuminates his philosophy concerning nature, civilization and industrialization. Oz's enduring influence on American culture is indisputable - witness its endless replication in books, films, musicals and theme parks. In returning to the original source of that influence, Riley serves as our guide to that land over the rainbow and inspires renewed appreciation for a great writer's magical vision.

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