The Hegemonic Construction of the Modern Fairytale: Wonderland, Oz, and Enchanting Ideologies of Lost Little Girls

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In L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, originally published in 1900, there is one important element which has often been overlooked and omitted from later Hollywood, and otherwise popular, succeeding renditions of the story: the Emerald City is *not actually emerald*. Rather, so the story goes, the powerless hoax of a Wizard of Oz, who reigns over the Emerald City, had commissioned at the time of the city’s building, that all who enter must wear green-tinted glasses. In Baum’s text, when Dorothy and her companions visit, for example, the little girl notices how even the hair and skin on everyone she meets within the city walls appears to have an inexplicably greenish hue. Even natural surrounding features, like the “sky above the City had a green tint, and the rays of sun were green” (Baum 2). Though this emerald appearance is obviously an illusion, a deliberate power-play by the Wizard to make his kingdom seem magical and enticing, no Ozian citizen or visitor questions either the function of the glasses or the greenness of the city. The Wizard, who of course has no true magical power of his own, maintains his authority by controlling and manipulating the way Ozians view their surroundings. Even on the rare occurrence that he presents himself to an audience, he hides behind elaborate stage contraptions that produce more powerful or intimidating forms than his own flesh. The
Wizard’s power over the Ozians presents perhaps one of fiction’s greatest, most articulate examples of hegemony¹.

In addition to providing a vivid portrayal of hegemony in a fictional, faraway land, the story of Baum’s *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* also possesses a particularly potent hegemonic power of its own. Indeed, despite being published over a century ago, the influence of the story and characters of *Oz* continuously seem to gracefully and naturally infiltrate even contemporary culture. Adaptations and interpretations, sequels, prequels and remakes, everyday sayings and household phrases born from this work have all contributed to establishing the story as a national icon, and its importance to the construction of the American empire should not go unnoticed. The Emerald City continues to dazzle and enchant audiences, perhaps most famously, through the glamorous and sparkling lens of a colored television screen, i.e. the production of MGM’s 1939 film, “The Wizard of Oz” (which incidentally never mentioned the emerald-colored glasses that the Wizard was said to have commissioned). Pop culture and entertainment phenomena like *The Wiz*² and Gregory Maguire’s bestseller-turned-Broadway-musical *Wicked*, etc. have each, in some way or another, paid homage to Baum’s fairytale, and in so doing have (though maybe inadvertently) promoted values that are characteristically American. Even the federal government has blatantly elevated this children’s story to the status of patriotic symbol through the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who presents their Training Academy students with Yellow

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¹ The term hegemony, used by Lenin during the rise of Communism in Russia, most basically defines the power of the ruling class in producing ideas of truth to the masses (Downing, *Postmodernism* 137). In an analogous sense, Baum’s Wizard represents the dominant class while his green spectacles represent the cultural viewpoint through which a certain people group understands the world.

² An American musical to celebrate the culture of the Black American community. Renditions of this play have included icons like Michael Jackson and Diana Ross, and later, Queen Latifa, Mary J. Blige, and Ne-Yo.
Bricks upon graduation\textsuperscript{3}. Because they are based in a children’s story, images from *Oz* have often been dismissed as childish or unsophisticated, but their continued relevance in American culture has proved undeniably influential.

In a similar way, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, published in England, thirty-five years earlier than Baum’s book, exhibits a monumental cultural presence. There is not a souvenir shop in Oxford (UK) that doesn’t carry an Alice tea set, or a downtown street that doesn’t advertise for an “Alice Tour” of the city. Even in the United States, tourist families wait in long lines at Walt Disney World to take a ride on the famous spinning tea cups with the Mad Hatter. In New York City’s Central Park, a bronze statue has been erected to immortalize Alice and acknowledge her remarkable cultural influence. Undeniably, these two little girls have greatly impacted modern society and their presence in our contemporary culture ought not to be ignored.

And yet, in spite of this cultural dominance and widespread popularity, the original texts of *Oz* and *Alice* have experienced steep decline in readership, particularly with children, and for all the fondness bestowed upon the names Dorothy and Alice, the names L. Frank Baum and Lewis Carroll seem to have passed on unremembered. Of course, children who had read Baum’s original *Oz* at the peak of its popularity in the early twentieth-century, like American 1960s critic Martin Gardner, grew up to praise the timelessness and success of the text, to predict that “the Emerald City [would not] collapse for a long, long time,” and that generally speaking, the “child’s love of fantasy is too healthy a love” for the bedtime stories of *Oz* to simply fade away.

\textsuperscript{3} The FBI Training Academy, located in Quantico, VA, has organized their elite fitness program around an *Oz* theme. Law enforcement officers from around the world who have gone through FBI training return home, bearing the Yellow Brick which has come to be seen as the iconic and respected symbol for the National Academy.
Even the *New York Times*, upon Baum’s death in 1919, printed that “years from now, though the children cannot clamor for the newest Oz book, the crowding generations will plead for the old ones” (qtd. in “An Appreciation,” Nye 1). However, as time went on, these predictions seem not to have held entirely true. Certainly *Oz* has established its presence in contemporary culture, and certainly most American children today may be familiar with Dorothy and Toto, but very few have actually encountered the original text or the author who Gardner and the *Times* hold in such high esteem. The greatest fault in these rather confident assertions is the assumption that childhood and children’s perspectives are universal and that love of fairytale is an innate and characteristic feature of childhood. The very same critic, Martin Gardner, who promised the immortality of *Oz* among child readers everywhere and believed that critics and educators should recognize the work’s literary merit, also denounced Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, which had been published only thirty-five years prior to *Oz*, for its failure to sustain the “universal” interests of children into modernity. For Gardner, though he acknowledges Carroll’s *Alice* as a masterpiece, wonderfully filled with witty puns and riddles, philosophical and mathematical puzzles, and subversive commentary on Victorian society, the story seems irrelevant and ultimately inaccessible to children. “The time is past,” he explains, “when a child under fifteen, even in England, can read *Alice* with the same delight” (*The Annotated Alice* 7). Perhaps this is true, we might think, but another half-century later, we might just as easily declare that the time is past when a child under fifteen reads the text of *Oz* with the same delight. Gardner’s opinion is biased and culturally conditioned by the literature he read as a child. Where the American Gardner considers Baum’s work to be a timeless children’s classic, Baum himself held his predecessor’s (Carroll) work in similar regard, expressing admiration for

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4 Gardner is perhaps best known for his book, *Annotated Alice*, which provides an exhaustive commentary on the work.
Carroll’s solid grasp on the child’s need to be entertained. “The secret of Alice’s success,”
Baum once expressed, “lay in the fact that she was a real child, and any normal child could
sympathize with her all through her adventures” (Rogers 92). Baum would have been just a
young boy when Carroll’s Alice books were published, and as an admirer of the Victorian
classics, he no doubt read them as a child. Baum’s Oz books quite obviously reflect his endeavor
to create an Americanized version of Carroll’s Alice, which of course is why many have easily
spotted correlation between the two works. Nevertheless, critics like Gardner continue to assert
that their own childhood favorite remains obviously superior. The only explanation for his
blatantly biased analysis and ethnocentric interpretation is this: Gardner remains unaware of the
fact that he reads through emerald-colored glasses.

Essentially, in his assessment of the lasting successes of Alice and Oz as well as their
place in his contemporary culture, Gardner simply addresses the wrong question. The question
of superiority when comparing these two pieces is not only too broad, but also nearly impossible
to give a single, critical and unbiased answer. There is little use in comparing the aesthetic and
commercial values of Emerald Cities and ruby Red Queens. Rather, a better question would
consider the unique nature and cultural function common to both the Alice and Oz texts. In
addition to correlation in genre and in plot, the most significant commonality between these two
stories is their lingering cultural influence in spite of abandoned texts. The key to understanding
this cultural dominance of Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Baum’s Wonderful
Wizard of Oz, then, is to examine not only the hegemonic function of the modern fairytale, but
also the specific ideologies which these works perpetuate.

In order to understand the hegemonic function of the genre, however, readers must first
establish a clear understanding of what exactly the genre entails. Analogously, perhaps we might
say that in order to understand how the Wizard’s glasses work, i.e. their function, we ought to evaluate the combination of their materials, i.e. their construction. Most basically, Alice and Oz belong to the canon of what we might call modern fairy tale literature, a genre established in the nineteenth century which combined myth, traditional fairytale, and children’s literature. However, defining these three elements—myth, fairytale, and children’s literature—in the makeup of this particular kind of narrative has proven to be somewhat difficult. Because ideologies about each of these terms have changed significantly over time, a fair amount of crossover has occurred and it is often somewhat challenging to distinguish one from the others. Twentieth-century Oxford lecturer, ingenious author of Lord of the Rings and arguably one of the greatest writers to have ever written in or on the fairytale genre, J.R.R. Tolkien perhaps most articulately acknowledges this problem in his essay, “On Fairy-Stories”:

“Even with regard to language…the essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living monument is…far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history…

So with regard to fairy-story, I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them…” (7)

For Tolkien, a solid definition for the fairytale, as a “living monument,” remains elusive because the genre is both alive and relevant today. It is far more difficult, according to this opinion, to describe what exactly the fairytale means to us today than it is to describe its origins. Still, Tolkien offers a solution in his essay, which suggests that a true understanding of fairytale, its function, its values and “what [it has] become for us” cannot be attained without a firm grasp on the concepts of myth, traditional fairytale, and children and their interrelationships.
Considering the fact that both Baum and Gardner believe, to some extent, that the eternal nature of the *Alice* or *Oz* stories is due to their seemingly universal appeal, the most relevant and important of these ideology-framing materials to address is the idea of myth. Many readers and scholars tend to naturally assume a relationship between myth and fairytale, though definitions of both have changed over time. On one hand, perhaps this natural association is because, despite these changes, both fairytales and myths (at least in the traditional sense) have exhibited such strong cultural presences—think Greco-Roman mythology, German fairytales, etc.—and so, many readers are apt to muddle definitions based on the similar, prominent places in culture which these stories occupy. On the other hand, others assume that myth and fairytale are related because, perhaps like Baum and Gardner do, they believe that fairytale is merely an expression of myth. That is, these readers will assert that fairytale is an interpretation of a story which relates to all human experience and might therefore be considered universal. Nevertheless, these two terms obviously cannot be used synonymously and thus an agreed definition ought to be established before continuing.

Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray provide perhaps one of the most basic technical definitions of myth in its traditional sense in their *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Myth, they explain represents “a traditional anonymous story…told by a particular cultural group in order to explain a natural or cosmic phenomenon” (323). By this definition, the mythic genre may already appear to provide a voice for the hegemonic communication of cultural ideologies. The fact that such a story is told by “a particular cultural group in order to explain,” and the requirement that the story should be both “anonymous” and “traditional,” may suggest that this kind of story could perhaps be used as a vessel for promoting cultural beliefs and preserving a certain societal outlook. For instance, when ancient Greeks explain the seasons
of the earth, via the story of Persephone\textsuperscript{5}, they simultaneously perpetuate a patriarchal ideology, where females are raped and imprisoned by an ultimately dominant male character. Still, the primary purpose of these myths is blatantly to explain and allegorize a natural phenomenon. Where the Persephone myth may certainly say something about Greek culture and Hellenistic society, the original purpose of the story was to make sense of the mysterious changing seasons by means of narrative. Though ideology may certainly influence the formation of this story, these stories are not necessarily considered moralistic or instructive, their characters are often tragic or deeply flawed. That is, for instance, few may strive to emulate the fiery, angry disposition of the Norse god, Thor, or the sex-driven lightning-bearing Greek Zeus, though these personalities provide fascinating explanations for violent lightning and thunder storms. These non-instructive, explanatory narrations then are largely considered “lower mythology” (Tolkien, 8). This is the most basic form of myth.

If myth as an allegory for nature is regarded as the “lower” order of the genre, then myth as a narrative of universal human experience perhaps may be considered “higher” order. At least, this is the discussion in which critics of myth participate today [RW]. That is, many critics have considered the narratives of myth, those basic plots around which these explanatory stories are formed, to be malleable in the sense that they often reveal transcultural and transgenerational qualities. These critics believe that myth is composed of recycled narrative patterns which reveal the core of human experience. In other words, by this definition, myth is not merely a story

\textsuperscript{5} Persephone, daughter of Ceres (the goddess of wheat), was kidnapped and raped by Hades (ruler of the Underworld). Ceres strikes a bargain with Hades that her daughter may surface to earth for one half of every year on the condition that she return to the Underworld as Hades’s queen for the other half. As a result of this deal, the land blooms in flowers and greenery when Persephone is reunited with her mother, and returns to dead and barren when she sits beside Hades on her gloomy throne. Today we recognize this mother-daughter reunion as the seasons of spring and summer, while Persephone’s marriage with Hades represents fall and winter.
whose primary function is to explain the way of the world to a particular people group, but rather a story that explains the patterns of human life to all people. In narrative formulas, myth is a constant element. Among these critics is Hollywood’s screenwriting coach and script consultant, Linda Seger, whose definition of myth, in her essay “Creating the Myth” speaks more to this universal aspect. She writes:

“Myths are the common stories at the root of our universal existence. They’re found in *all* cultures in *all* literature, ranging from the Greek myths to fairy tales, legends, and stories drawn from all of the world’s religions.” (*Signs of Life in the USA* 317)

That is, more broadly than the “lower mythology” described by Murfin and Ray, Seger’s myth is a broader, universally recognized story, and the fairy tale is merely the manipulation of myth to communicate the values of a particular time or culture. Myth is embedded within fairytale narratives. In her essay Seger explains that myth is accessible to all people and can take the form of only a few basic plots. By her definition, for example, *Alice* and *Oz* might belong to what she calls the “hero myth” (Seger 318). In this narrative pattern⁶ the hero—or heroine—sets on a journey or quest. The hero often begins as a “nonhero,” who is “innocent, young, simple, or humble” (Seger 318), and the journey therefore initiates their transformation into “hero”.

Reduction of story to its raw plot thus may reveal an obvious relation of even the highest, most sophisticated classics to the oft-overlooked literature for children. For example, to Seger, great epics of antiquity like *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* are in essence the same basic story as *Alice* and *Oz*. Scholars like Tolkien, however, take issue with viewpoints that equates stories in this way, explaining that boiling down narratives to mere plotlines displays a disregard for the

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⁶ In her essay, Seger uses Luke Skywalker from “Star Wars” as her example.
integrity and complexity of the individual work. In his own essay, he warns against this approach:

“Students of folklore are apt to get off their own proper track...they are inclined to say that any two stories that are built around the same folklore motive, or are made up of a generally similar combination of such motives, are ‘the same stories’…We read that…’the Black Bull of Norroway is Beauty and the Beast,’ or ‘is the same story as Eros and Psyche.’” (Tolkien 6)

Tolkien continues on to point out the fallacy of statements like Seger’s, asserting that stories that have been adapted and interpreted to fit a certain time or culture cannot be regarded in the same light as their parent story. Adapted fairytales then, are more than just recycled mythic narratives and their cultural significance and appeal is far more sophisticated than simply being relatable cultural anecdotes. Where these observations of recurring stories may possess “some element of truth” he says, this truth is expressed “in undue abbreviation,” and these stories ought not to be treated as if they were secondhand (Tolkien 7). Though from Tolkien’s viewpoint, Seger may seem to have fallen among the scholars who have steered “off their own proper track,” her suggestion that narrative is an inherent part of all people groups and their formation of culture provides perhaps an generalization of the theory promoted by American mythologist, Joseph Campbell.

Campbell introduces perhaps the broadest, most inclusive understanding of myth. Like Seger, he emphasizes the universal attraction to myth and stories that follow rather simplistic plotlines and introduce mostly archetypal characters. However, unlike Seger, Campbell discusses “myth” almost as if it were an action. He suggests that all people turn to myth to provide answers to questions concerning not nature, not popularity, but universal truths. On one
point, Seger and Campbell appear to agree: “myth is that field of reference, metaphors referring to what is absolutely transcendent” (Campbell, interview 1988). However, where Seger proposes that mythic narrative is the expression of universal human experiences, Campbell asserts that myth is the result of not only human experience, but the human quest for truth. In this sense, myth carries a more personal and spiritual undertone than simply an isolated plot which will be borrowed and reused, even taking forms like religion. “Myths,” he says in an interview discussing his work (*The Power of Myth*), “are the clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life” (1988). In this way, myths also hold a pedagogical element, according to Campbell. These truth-seeking narratives also provide “life models,” which must “be appropriate to the possibilities of the time in which [the author is] living” (1988). Unlike the myths described by Seger or Murfin and Ray, Campbell’s myths do not teach their audiences what the world is, so much as they provide instruction on how to live in it. Therefore, by this definition, the myth—which has been identified as a narrative device instinctual to the human race—may develop differently, depending on the time and place of its origin. All human life thirsts for story, either to make sense of the world as it is, or to make sense of the world that it should be. In this way, myth seems to naturally lend itself as a vessel to hegemonic discourse, though some forms of this vessel may certainly be more powerful than others.

One of the most powerful of these forms then, is the fairytale. Murfin and Ray of the *Bedford Glossary* identify fairytale most basically as “a prose narrative intended to entertain or instruct that typically relates fantastic or magical occurrences involving a hero or heroine…characterized by a number of elements…commonly considered children’s literature” (163). When viewed in relation to myth, however, fairytale appears to exude much more cultural influence. Returning to the analogous image of colored spectacles: if myth were to make up the
primary material from which the glasses are made, then fairytale might represent the forms into which this material was molded. That is, myth may be universally accessible, but fairytale, by nature, is not—though its mythic qualities certainly make it widely attractive. Very similarly to Campbell’s take on mythology, the opinion on fairy tales expressed by Freudian disciple and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung presents these stories as “a source of wisdom” that “reveal[s] spiritual truths” (qtd. in Kidd 11). To Jung, fairytale reflects a sort of human or cultural primitivism (which he compares to childhood) that reveals the “collective unconscious” of the culture in which they were created (qtd. in Kidd 9). In his “Phenomenology of the Spirit of Fairytales” he writes that fairytales are “spontaneous, naïve and uncontrived products of the psyche… [that cannot express] anything else except what the psyche actually is” (qtd. in Kid 10). That is, fairytales unavoidably expose the values and beliefs of the growing and developing communities from which they came. Fairytales, we might say then, are the culturally-specific application of myth as Campbell describes it, as humanity’s quest for truth.

However as Tolkien articulates, unlike myth, fairytale utilizes the process of “sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world” (8). Though Tolkien’s comparison may perhaps most clearly refer to “lower mythology,” his observation of this sub-creation construction is perhaps the most important defining feature of the fairytale. By technical definition, the fairytale world functions independently from reality, there is no intentional correlation between the story and the natural world. Sub-creation, that is, is more escapist than explanatory. Rather than realizing universal truths of the world through narrative as in basic mythology, fairytale promotes only the truths that have been accepted or promoted by a particular community. By the process of sub-creation,

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7 Kidd, Kenneth B. “Kids, Fairy Tales, and the Uses of Enchantment”. *Freud in Oz*. 
fairytale is able to create an idealized (and to an extent, controlled) universe that recreates the world either as the author currently sees it, or as s/he believes it should look. Fairytale does not necessarily discover truth, as Campbell suggests of myth, so much as it creates truth. In this way, fairytale narratives reflect the efforts of a growing community and culture to establish and expand their own ideology, therefore making this fictional discourse by nature, hegemonic.

It is worth noting, however, that by the old tradition of fairytale and sub-creation, as defined by Tolkien, works like Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland do not classify as true fairytales. Tolkien discredits the work of Carroll along with that of his own contemporary, C.S. Lewis (author of The Chronicles of Narnia) from fairy tale because by using the “machinery of Dream” these works “[cheat] deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faerie, the realization, independent of the conceiving mind of imagined wonder,” i.e. their sub-created worlds are not presented as true (Tolkien 5). Despite, his story’s cultural influence, Carroll’s use of dream and human sleep as a portal to Wonderland technically disqualify his work from the ranks of Grimm, Andersen, and MacDonald fairytales. Yet Tolkien both acknowledges Alice’s close relation to fairytale and admits to the work’s success as an “amusing…dream story,” in which we might “ignore the frame [of sleep]” (5). Interestingly however, despite its obvious descent from Alice, Baum’s Oz, in its original text, dutifully adheres to these rules of fairytale\(^8\), to which Baum himself paid careful attention. Still, even considering Baum’s carefulness, both Alice and Oz stray from the fairytale tradition embraced by Tolkien. That is, rather than held in high regard as the tremendous cultural monuments that they are, Carroll’s and Baum’s stories have historically been brushed aside as playful and silly bedtime stories intended exclusively for children.

\(^8\) Disregarding MGM’s decision to incorporate Dorothy emerging from sleep in the film version.
Tolkien bitterly acknowledges this new limitation of the fairytale audience only as a serious and tragic mishap as he laments:

“The association of Children and fairy story is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-story in the modern lettered world has been...relegated to the ‘nursery’ as shabby...furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because the adults do not want it...it is not the choice of the children who decides this” (11).

Though Tolkien makes a valid point that this genre of monumental cultural significance ought not to be treated like shabby furniture donated to child’s play, what he fails to consider is the birth of a new type of literature, perhaps of even greater hegemonic value than its predecessor. As a result of this domestic accident, for instance, came works like Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, and A. A. Milne’s *Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*. The very genre itself was being reformed. Tolkien’s discussion of fairytale is built on the notion that the continued production and reproduction of fairy-tale exclusively for child audiences mars the integrity of the genre, leaving the tradition “gravely impaired” (12). But perhaps there is another way to regard the reformation. We might view fairy-tale’s exile to the nursery more optimistically: the presence of fairy-tale in the nursery does not destroy the old tradition of fairy-tale, but rather introduces a new tradition of the *modern* fairy-tale.

That is, contrary to Tolkien’s laments, emerald glasses do not necessarily lose their ideological function simply because the style of their frames has been modified. If myth is the material makeup of these glasses, and fairytale its various forms and parts, then the genre of children’s literature must be the specific design by which these parts are arranged. Therefore, since *Alice* and *Oz* maintain the elements of fairytale in all other respects, and since their cultural significance exhibits fairytale’s ultimate function, we might rightfully discount Tolkien’s
classification and welcome Carroll and Baum, back to the lineage of fairytale writers. Still, it is necessary to acknowledge the history of this significant style change in order to understand its effect on the cultural function of the fairytale narrative.

Before the style of children’s literature was applied to fairytale sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, work in this genre was for the most part, explicitly didactic. Though Tolkien condemns this genre for being unsophisticated and simple, any study concerning the origins of children’s literature should prove the field’s complexity due to the “curious and paradoxical cultural space [children’s literature occupies]…that is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive” (Reynolds 3). Even the most overlooked, radical, and subversive of this literature inherently carries out an educational function. Just as the fairytale promotes a particular ideological perspective, so children’s literature plants such a perspective within the developing minds of the up-and-coming generation. Children’s literature critic, Mary V. Jackson cautions readers of this phenomenon:

“Whether subtly or blatantly, children’s books [are] largely propagandistic in nature. They [are] tools for social, moral, religious, and political conditioning. They [represent] the enormously powerful collusive efforts of…society…to program the young, to engineer conformity to the prevailing cultural values.” (Jackson 15, 16)

In this way, children’s literature is an even more effective vessel for hegemony in that invests in the minds of the future. Still, the explicit acknowledgement of this investment via intense didacticism and blatant instruction may limit this power somewhat. In her book, Engines of Instruction, Jackson takes on the role of social historian, acknowledging points where changes in a particular nation’s literature affect the development of its correlating society. Thus, according to Jackson, a nation’s literature may provide valuable and often indirect insight into said nation’s
social history by subversively promoting cultural values (16). Children’s stories thus function as
“engines,” cranking out the ideal image of childhood by the masses. Given the overlap of Alice, 
Oz, and other new fairytales of the nineteenth century with the British and American industrial
eras and factory ages, Jackson’s “engine” analogy seems all the more appropriate. Simply put, be- 
side the target audience of children’s literature (i.e. children) is by nature impressionable and
seeking to learn about the world, any literary genre which intentionally isolates this readership
automatically participates in youth education. That is, children’s literature unavoidably
communicates through adult-child, and subsequently, teacher-student relationships. Despite
authors’ attempts to avoid this, reading and writing stories for children will inevitably
communicate the worldview of the adult doing the story-telling.

Bearing these reader-relationships in mind, then, discouraging adults from reading
children’s literature also becomes problematic. Again, Tolkien may be reassured that the
movement of fairytale to children’s literature does not necessarily mean that these narratives will
experience such a great decline in readership, at least they shouldn’t. British professor,
Kimberley Reynolds of Newcastle University believes that adults should devote particular
critical attention to children’s literature. In her book, Radical Children’s Literature, Reynolds
challenges the popular notion that children’s literature is of less importance, or lacking in both
sophistication and social purpose, than adult literature. She draws attention to several of the
most influential writers of the adult classics who have expressed an interest, and even dabbled
themselves, in children’s literature. Among these, she lists Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, W.H.
Auden, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce, to name a few. She astutely points out
that even “the opening passages of Portrait”\(^9\) …testify to the fact that Joyce was a close observer of…the young child’s pleasure in responding to and playing with words, meanings, and rhythm” (Reynolds 27). In addition, she acknowledges Joyce’s famous “interest in traditional tales—the myths, legends, folktales, nursery rhymes, and ballads” (Reynolds 27). Even author of Alice, Lewis Carroll—which is really a pseudonym for the Oxford don and prodigy mathematician, Charles Dodgson—did not resort to writing children’s literature because he was incapable of communicating complex ideas to the adult world. Indeed, if writers like Joyce and Carroll, monuments of modern and literary genius, have recognized the linguistic and traditional power of children’s literature to society, surely we would be sorely mistaken to limit the audience of this genre, particularly in its fairytale form. Perhaps Reynolds articulates this best when she writes that Gertrude Stein’s stories for children reflect “not a simple investment in the future, but a recognition that children are not outside of culture” (28). Therefore, their literature merits the same degree of critical attention and analysis as any lauded or highly-esteemed adult classic, or any traditional fairytale, for that matter.

Considering the importance of children’s literature, its history, and most importantly, its relation to the fairytale, readers should know that Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland has largely been considered a radical pivot point for the development of the genre. Beginning specifically in Victorian England with Alice and similar stories, children’s literature mimicked the traditions of the past only mockingly or satirically. Authors of the new children’s literature desperately tried to dissociate themselves from their predecessors. To Victorian scholar and author of The Image of Childhood, Peter Coveny, children’s literature of the seventeenth- and eighteenth- centuries

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\(^9\) Short for James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man, a complex bildungsroman of the early twentieth-century, generally understood to reflect modernist thought.
exhibited a cultural preference for the ideas of English philosopher, John Locke (17th c.). At this time children’s authors and their fellow Englishmen embraced Locke’s concept of *tabula rasa*, which considered childhood to be a blank slate upon which societal rules should be written. Their books therefore emphasized reason and rationality, manners and good behavior. Coveny notes that even portraiture at this time depicted the matured faces and postures of adults on children’s bodies (40). However, with the growing disparity between childhood and adulthood, and the new societal emphasis on childhood, spurred on perhaps by the Child Labor Laws of the nineteenth-century, Victorians soon began to show preference for the ideas of eighteenth-century philosopher Jacques Rousseau. In contrast to Locke’s opinion that children should be taught to grow up as soon as possible, Rousseau suggests that adults ought to stop “looking for the man in the child,” and instead aim to develop “the original nature of the child” (qtd. in Coveny 43, 44).

Even painted portraiture reflected this transition. Scholar Jackie Wullschlager points out that it was not until the nineteenth-century painter John Everett Millais’s painting for a Pears Soap advertisement that these portraits of miniature adults transformed into the big-eyed, rosy-cheeked innocent faces of children (Wullschlager 13). As a result of this transition of values, Wullschlager acknowledges that for the Victorians, “the child came to be seen as a symbol, in a prosperous, progressive society of hope and optimism” (12).

Specifically in the case of literature, Patricia Demers and Gordon Moyles provide perhaps the best outline of this revolution in their anthology of children’s literature. This work establishes the chronology of the books preceding *Alice*, highlighting the rebellion and transition from eighteenth- to nineteenth-century standards of children’s literature. *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children’s Literature to 1850* thus traces the progression of the fiction books of English childhood, up to the time of Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice* books were published
in 1865. Considering this shift in values from Locke to Rousseau, the title, *Instruction to Delight* certainly seems an accurate summary. Eighteenth-century children’s stories often had one single, didactic purpose: to instruct children on how to behave as little adults. In her critical work, *Inventing Wonderland*, scholar Jackie Wullschlager clarifies that in eighteenth-century England, childhood was viewed mostly as a “period of training for adulthood” (12). That is, there was little distinction between the lives of children and adults, one was viewed merely as the early stages of the other and there was little nostalgia expressed for the childhood days of the past. Childhood had very technically been considered an inexperienced version of adulthood and British children’s books of the eighteenth-century thus functioned primarily as manuals to prepare for this adult experience. In their anthology, Demers and Moyles include poetry samples of one of the most popular pre-Victorian children’s writers, Isaac Watts to demonstrate this concept. Here, the first stanza of Watts’s poem, “Against Idleness and Mischief” presents the image of a busy bee in hopes that children might emulate her diligence:

“How doth the little busy bee

Improve each shining hour,

And gather honey all the day

From every opening flower” (CITE).

To authors like Lewis Carroll, however, this training of miniature-adults for lives of hard work and maintained social etiquette was ridiculous. Thus his work represents the nineteenth-century reaction to this approach. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll references Watts’s didactic poem in a parody which promotes vanity and luxury, in opposition to the little bee’s hard work:
“How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!” (CITE 38).

Despite this rebellion against instruction, however, the Victorian writer—like the American Baum after him—seems to be unaware of the concept that twentieth-century scholar Jackson\(^\text{10}\) acknowledges as the “propagandistic nature” of children’s literature. That is, though the efforts of Carroll and his successors aim to delight, the very fact that they write for children implies that they instruct by default. Like the explicitly didactic author, the author of modern children’s literature still teaches the child how to function in society, though the ultimate lesson is delaying maturation, not speeding it up. The Victorian’s inclusion of far-off lands and their overall goal to entertain, make this instruction all the more subversive. The efforts of nineteenth-century children’s fairytale literature to instill culturally appropriate behavior in children by means of entertaining them thus exemplifies the most powerful form of ideology: “when no one recognizes…[it] as ideology, when people regard their everyday thoughts as ‘natural’” (Downing 146)\(^\text{11}\). For instance, Carroll may boast (like Baum will of Oz) that the Alice books were written for no other purpose than to amuse children by parodying their lessons, but only a historian or critic may observe how he inadvertently perpetuated his own cultural values in his work. Alice, for example, is curious and at times even a little adventuresome, but she is always polite, never rude or disobedient; she is always composed and self-controlled, never loud or hysterical; she is

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\(^{10}\) Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction.*
\(^{11}\) Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth.*
always kind and nurturing, never taunting or mischievous. In this way, it may be argued that the character of Alice promotes the patriarchal ideology of the Victorians. That is, these characteristics of Alice also reflect the submissive and subdued woman of nineteenth-century England. Lost in the playful wordplay and captivating adventures of the Alice books, few readers—child or adult—would venture to question or second guess the behavior of the little heroine. Nevertheless, if these works, like Carroll’s Alice, were merely reactionary and if they promote an ideology specific to a single culture, then once again we must ask, why have these specific works endured past their revolutionary function to permeate our contemporary, removed society?

Of course, this reactionary aspect of works like Alice may only account for their immediate popularity. Their contribution to the reformation and development of the fairytale, however, may have been more likely to sustain interest in the long run. Thus, the intersection of these two genres may be placed sometime in the mid-nineteenth century. On one hand, neither critic nor historian can deny the intense fascination with fantasy and fairytale which surged among British and American readers of the nineteenth- and twentieth- centuries. On the other hand, scholars have also acknowledged the increased social value of children during this time and efforts to preserve childhood innocence and delay adult maturation. Naturally, it was this combined interest that would eventually fuse the tradition of fairytale literature with children’s literature. England, at this time under the reign of Queen Victoria, developed a particular nostalgia for stories of the past. The arts of this era produced several echoes and retellings of many of the most famous stories in Western legend and mythology. Among these echoes we
might find Alfred Lord Tennyson’s famous poem *Idylls of the King*\(^{12}\), or Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s dreamlike portrait of Persephone along with the other whimsical paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood\(^{13}\). Beyond mere nostalgia, interest in these stories exhibited a longing for a world removed, the heroic days of medieval kings and queens and martyrs, the realm of the Olympian gods, etc. The entire nation had been attracted to these kinds of stories, regardless of age, and so the “sub-creation” of Faerie\(^{14}\) lands held particular appeal. These Faerie lands perhaps were revered by child audiences because they were strange and unfamiliar. Tales of strange and unfamiliar creatures like fairies, elves, mermaids, and talking animals living in an alternate dimension evoke a sense of wonder and curiosity, often thought to be the same innocent sensation as a child seeing the world for the first time. Thus the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, originally written with no regard for the innocent ears of children\(^{15}\), grew increasingly popular among child audiences. Though whether this is the result of children’s genuine interest in fairy-tale, or simply adults reading these stories of wonder and bewilderment to children for the purposes of delaying the realities of adulthood, remains unclear. Indeed, because the child’s world is so censored and manipulated by adults, it becomes slightly difficult to say what children are most interested in, given their limited options. Bruno Bettelheim, in his 1989 book, *The Uses of Enchantment* proposes that children ought to be

\(^{12}\) Tennyson’s poems tell the legend of King Arthur, a famous hero of English history.

\(^{13}\) Founded in England in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of painters known for their obsessively realistic paintings of scenes from literature, legend, and folklore. Among this group were painters like John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

\(^{14}\) In his essay “On Fairy-Stories” Tolkien defines Faerie as “the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (4). Not all fairy-tales must have fairies, but all must possess the element of Faerie.

\(^{15}\) The original stories of Andersen and Grimm are actually quite gruesome and in modernity would undoubtedly be deemed inappropriate for children. For example, Andersen’s little mermaid loses her prince to another woman and is eventually forced to commit suicide in order to save the life of her lost love, while in Grimm, Cinderella’s stepsisters violently amputate their toes and heels in order to fit the coveted slipper.
nurtured on fairytale and specifically, that these stories should be read aloud to them by adults. “The form and structure of fairy tales,” he claims, “suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life” (qtd. in Kidd 20).

Similarly, nineteenth-century psychologist, Sigmund Freud (and Jung as well) took particular interest in the subject of fairytales and their influence on the development of children, comparing this influence with his studies on dreams (4). Thus, whether they were intended to or not, fairytales at this time were also considered to possess a psychological function. Children now not only desired these stories, but they needed them for the development of their mental well-being. Thoughts like this only enhanced the ideological value of the modern fairytale.

Still, like their predecessors, modern fairytales are not exempt from cultural embeddedness. Twentieth-century poet, W. H. Auden exhibits this when he asks the adult reader of Alice, “Is Alice...an adequate symbol for what every human being should try to be like?” (qtd. in Aspects of Alice 12). The poet himself, perhaps recalling his own Victorian childhood, writes that he is “inclined to answer yes,” but readers of this study ought to be inclined to answer “no” (12). In fact, even earlier in the same essay Auden writes that “nothing could be more remote from [the American children’s] worlds than the world of Alice” (8). Though the heroine, Alice was certainly designed to represent the Victorian ideal, a prototype to be emulated, her culturally embeddedness makes her difficult for an American child to admire or emulate with the same enthusiasm. That is simply to say that where Alice may represent what “every human being should try to be like” in the Victorian eye, to the Americans, she is too foreign and too confusing to follow as a role model.

Thus, if Carroll’s Alice is one of the founders of this new tradition of fairytale for children, then young Dorothy of L. Frank Baum’s The Wonderful Wizard of Oz might be the
second generation, that is, the first of those born into this newly established genre. In his introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum himself makes explicit his intention to contribute to the modern fairytale. Though he lauds the success of Grimm and Andersen for having “brought more happiness to childish hearts than all other human creation,” the late nineteenth-century American author nevertheless endorses this split in readership of fairytale literature between children and adults. The “horrible and blood-curling incidents devised” by the authors of the old fairy-tale, an appalled Baum argues, ought to be eliminated from these stories which so obviously have attracted a large child audience. How absurd that such gruesomeness and harshness should be included in stories read by the young and innocent! What the author fails to realize, of course, is that the stories of Grimm and Andersen were not originally intended to “bring happiness to childish hearts” and in fact (as Tolkien has argued16) children do not enjoy or understand fairy-tale any more than adults or “all other human creation”. Baum’s problematic assumptions regarding the old fairy-tale thus may be observed in his *Oz* introduction:

“Yet the old time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classified as ‘historical’ in the children’s library; for the time has come for a series of new ‘wonder tales’ [which eliminate]…all the horrible and blood-curling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale…The modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incident” (Baum, “Introduction” to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*).

Essentially Baum’s attempt to distinguish his version of fairytale from the traditional stories rests on the relatively weak assumption that the fairy-tale has *always* captured children’s interest and

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16 “Children as a class…neither like fairy-stories more, nor understand them better than adults do; and no more than they like many other things.” (Tolkien, 11)
that this interest was conceived independently from adult influence. The claim that the “old time fairy tale” is now extinct from the children’s library, therefore, is of no great consequence because clearly the old stories never truly belonged to the canon of children’s literature in the first place. Baum’s recognition that “the time has come for a series of new ‘wonder tales’” is sound: the fairy-tale canon has changed. But the author’s underlying assumptions suggest a failure to distinguish one genre from another, which implies that he too has fallen victim to the ideological belief of the nineteenth-century that children have and always will have a need for fairytale.

Many writers of nineteenth-century children’s fairytale like Baum proclaim that their stories avert the previous didacticism of children’s literature (preceding Alice) and are written merely for children’s amusement. Though Baum adamantly claims to avert didacticism, he seems unaware of the inherent “propagandistic nature” of his own work, of children’s literature in general. Though Baum’s work is not necessarily explicitly didactic or instructive, it does provide insight to his world. Some readers, like Henry M. Littlefield, however, have misinterpreted this historical insight from The Wonderful Wizard of Oz as direct political allegory of the American Populist Movement. Obviously, these theorists have not fully grasped the nature of the fairy-tale and have not encountered or considered W. H. Auden’s warning that “to hunt for symbols in a fairy tale is absolutely fatal” (qtd. in The Annotated Wizard of Oz, “Introduction”, 39). Littlefield believes that each character and/or image in the story represents a clear and direct political symbol which aligns with specific historic figures and events of the time (e.g. the Scarecrow represents the farmer; the Tin Woodsman, the factory

17 American political movement started in the late nineteenth-century. The movement supported mid-Western farmers and has historically been associated with Democrat and presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan.
workers; the yellow brick road, the Gold Standard; the silver slippers, the Silver Standard\textsuperscript{18}, etc.). Though historic events and the political ideas of his contemporary society are undoubtedly present in Baum’s fantastical Land of Oz, it would be simplistic and reductive to characterize this work merely as a literary political cartoon. To bring into question Baum’s claim that his novel was written “solely to please”—that is, not to critique or instruct—is not to question the author’s integrity, but rather his awareness of his own entrapment in an ideological system.

Having established an understanding of the hegemonic structure and function of these enchanting glasses, the next step is to evaluate the image which they portray. Readers of the modern fairytale ought to peer through its lenses and observe the colors, the actual ideologies, which can be viewed through them. In the cases of Alice and Oz, the observer might perceive the ideologies of two of the most powerful and dominant modern empires. In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries, when the peak of the modern British Empire under Victoria’s reign was coming to a close, England had established imperial power across the globe and subsequently, its literature had spread as well. The birth of a booming industrial era with huge developments in technology, transportation, and mass production also likely contributed to the creation of this global force. Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the United States was also making a name for itself as an imperial force to be reckoned with. Shortly following the period of Victoria’s reign in England, the United States whole-heartedly took on the quest for expansion across the North American continent. The promotion of “Manifest Destiny” sent many Americans westward, to the arid plains of Kansas and the Dakotas. Simultaneously, however, The U.S. was also undergoing a period of rapid technological development. There was a notable

\textsuperscript{18} In the original text of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum, Dorothy’s slippers were silver. The iconic “ruby red” slippers of Oz did not appear until the release of MGM’s 1939 film adaptation of Baum’s childhood classic.
influx of artists, architects, and inventors in growing cities like Chicago and New York who contributed to the creation of the skyscraper, transcontinental railroad, and the electric light bulb. Indeed, we might even be so reductive to say that the successful publications of *Alice* and *Oz* simply hit both empires at a time of rapid cultural development and growth. Thus, as the empire grew and expanded, so did its literature, revealing images of the wizards of industrialization, globalization, and empire.

In order to properly analyze the implications of these imperial ideologies which Wonderland and Oz promote, however, it is necessary to first recognize the relationship between their authors. To begin, Lewis Carroll’s world perhaps provides some of the most applicable evidence of not only how *Alice* influenced cultural ideology, but also how cultural ideology influenced *Alice*. To be clear, Lewis Carroll, was the pseudonym of the popular and beloved Victorian storyteller and author of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865. Born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson to a large family in England, the now world-renowned writer began as a student of Mathematics at Christ Church, Oxford. He later became a don and established a famous friendship with Dean Henry Liddell, who had three young daughters, Lorina, Alice, and Edith. Dodgson is remembered as having been very fond of spending his afternoons telling the little girls nonsense stories and frequently visiting the family in his spare time to entertain the children. The second oldest of the daughters, Alice, has popularly been considered the inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. The *Alice* books, we might note, thus began themselves as intimate oral stories which were later penned down and distributed to a mass audience. The Liddell girls, however, were the very first children to hear the *Alice* stories, through spontaneous oral narrations as Dodgson rowed dreamily with them along the Thames River “all in the golden afternoon” (Carroll 21). Young Alice was not only his
inspiration for a protagonist, but also the voice who encouraged Dodgson to pen down (and eventually publish) his stories. Dodgson maintained a close friendship with Alice throughout their lives. Actually, many readers today who are encountering Carroll’s biography for the first time are often appalled by just how close this friendship was. Fairly intimate letters were exchanged between them, and Dodgson—an amateur, though talented and up-and-coming photographer—often photographed young Alice nude or in sultry poses. Though no sound evidence truly exists suggesting that Dodgson and Alice had sexual relations, their relationship to the modern audience often appears dangerously too close for comfort and many new readers mistake the bachelor’s adoring interest for pedophilia.

A more accurate understanding of Dodgson’s doting behavior and affections, however, would recognize that this was a fairly normal Victorian relationship. Though the fact that this infatuation with girlhood was typical of Victorian society does not necessarily reduce its pedophilic appearance, it may however, shed some light on Carroll’s situation. In fact, even the most respectable scholars of the era, men like John Ruskin, were also often found in this setting of being left alone with young girls. Some even explicitly documented love interests and adoration far stronger than Dodgson/Carroll’s. Ruskin undoubtedly exhibits the most notorious of these relationships. Ruskin, another Oxonian (who ironically also served as little Alice Liddell’s drawing tutor), famously fell in love with a pretty little nine-year-old girl named Rose la Touche (Wullschlager 11). Intrigued by her innocence and purity, namely her virginity, Ruskin courted Rose as a sexless lover, while his wife “languished as [a virgin] because [her] husband declined sexual involvement” (Wullschlager 23). If they did not explicitly demonstrate this intense, though repressed sexual interest in children, as in this case, then many men like Ruskin—e.g. Thomas Carlyle and J. M. Barrie—denied their wives sex for this belief in the
virgin little girl as the “obvious ideal” (Wullschlager 23). Though the unmarried Dodgson may or may not have been counted among these men who shared the same pedophilic fantasy, his work certainly exudes this societal preference. Some have, perhaps over-ambitiously, even attributed many images in Alice to represent symbols of sexuality and pedophilic desire, e.g. symbols like falling down the rabbit hole or fitting keys into a lock to signify coitus, or the appearance of phallic symbols in the form of Alice’s growing and shrinking neck19 (qtd. in Aspects of Alice 280, 282). Where these assertions are not completely far-fetched, seeing as the entire appeal of these little girls lay in their virginity and sexual purity, it seems unlikely that Carroll should mar these qualities in his primary audience by littering his story with hidden sex symbols. Nevertheless, this Victorian attraction to little girls is little more than a side effect of the combined British ideologies of childhood and femininity.

The child, who had essentially been regarded as even a national symbol for Carroll and his contemporary Victorians, seemed not to strike the Americans with the same intense emotions or adorations. For the Americans, rather than function as the object of strong romantic or even sexual attraction, the child seemed more to serve as a vessel for commercialism. That is, arguably one of the biggest reasons Americans like Baum were so interested in the Alice books were because of their success. This attraction to success may perhaps reflect the ideas of American capitalism and the emphasis on individual success in opposition to the Victorian emphasis on socialism and communal success. For instance, to the American, the very appeal of the children’s fairytale may have been the fact that “children’s books were one of the most profitable parts of the Victorian publishing industry,” and were so popular and successful in England that the American’s felt excluded from Western culture for not having their own fairy-

tale tradition. Indeed even as *Oz* critic, Michael Patrick Hearn points out, “the [American] book trade’s response to Lewis Carroll’s death in 1898 was to put out books of both adulation and imitation”. Critic, John Funchion also suggests that *Oz* speaks particularly to American consumer culture in his essay, "When Dorothy Became History: L. Frank Baum's Enduring Fantasy of Cosmopolitan Nostalgia". Here, Funchion asserts that Oz reflects aspects of a growing, globalizing, capitalist society, embracing cosmopolitan ethics, but also maintaining a nostalgia for home. To Funchion, the story of Oz endures not because it is myth, but because it is modern *American*. Thus, the spirit of Oz is slightly different from that of Wonderland in that, to some extent, it is essentially only an Americanized version of Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. These American values may present themselves even in the fact that, as a result of the large immediate success of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum appeased the demands of his child fans by continuing on to write thirteen sequels to the original *Oz* story. He also was highly involved in the transfer of his story from text to the stage and eventually to the screen. By comparison, though Carroll did try his hand at one other children’s series, *Sylvie and Bruno*, despite high demand, he only produced one sequel to his original *Alice: Through the Looking Glass*, though he did also encourage the theatrical production of “Alice on Stage”. Thus, the American attention to the child for the most part had descended from the Victorian worship of the child, and their representation of children in fairy-tale literature inadvertently possesses a commercial function, reflective of consumer society. Simply put, the author’s very choice to set *Oz* to writing is a business decision, reflective of American consumerism, children buy (or at least their parents do), and fairy-tale sells.

Baum’s own biography, in fact, reveals an interest in performance, the stage, and commercialism. In other words, Baum was drawn to the spectacle. After a brief theater career
as actor and playwright, Baum met his wife, Maud Gage in New York and moved west to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where he worked as a newspaper writer and “frontier storekeeper” (Rogers, 23). Here, Baum had even more opportunity to refine his writing skills and gain experience in business and advertising. Baum also experimented with amateur photography and his work was featured in the local journal. The writer did not express particular love for the plains of South Dakota, but many believe this to be the landscape which inspired the dreary, gray homeland of his famous heroine, Dorothy. Some have suggested that Baum chose to place Dorothy in Kansas rather than South Dakota so as to avoid offending extended family members who he had been living near. Importantly, Baum developed a knack for arranging shop windows in the most aesthetic and appealing arrangement of products. He eventually began publishing his own journal, *The Show Window* (1897) which offered storeowners advice on how to arrange their shop windows and new and creative ways that would attract attention and stimulate business. Some even suggest that characters like the Tin Woodsman appeared to take vague shape in these designs (Loncraine 154). Baum’s background in theater and his experience in the commercialism of business and advertising affirm his desire to please, though in this light, we may understand his books to have been written perhaps not “solely to please a child,” but even solely to please a customer or consumer.

According to twenty-first century Baum biographer, however, Rebecca Loncraine, much more of the life story of L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, “like the fictional world he created, is uniquely American, rooted in the transforming historical changes of his times,” beyond American consumer culture (Loncraine xii). Born Lyman Frank Baum, son of a businessman in upstate New York, “Frankie” (he disliked his given first name, Lyman) was born on May 15, 1856. He grew up as a middle child—the fourth in line—to a large family. As
a young boy he was reported to have had a dangerously weak heart, which kept him indoors most
days while his brothers and sisters played outside. During these quiet hours inside, Frank
became an avid reader and developed a love for Victorian literature (no doubt where he first
encountered Carroll’s Alice stories). Though his heart condition never truly disappeared, as he
grew older he was able to participate in normal everyday activities. As an adolescent, Frank was
enrolled in a military school, briefly. Frank so disliked his teachers there that many believe they
appear as caricatures of authority figures throughout his literature. After his brief time at
military school, Frank’s academic training was sporadic and inconsistent. The surviving records
of Baum’s educational history suggest that the latest schooling he received was from Syracuse
Classical School, which he attended in 1873, but left after just a year. The writer never attended
college or obtained a degree, though his literary interest only grew stronger. Thus Frank built his
reputation as a writer in any way he could. According to legend, while still living as a boy or
young man in his father’s home, Frank fell so in love with an old printing press in a shop
window that his father bought it for him, leading to the homemade publication series of Frank’s
first home journal (Rogers 4). However, Baum dabbled in several other occupations as well,
such as actor and traveling salesmen, before the release of his Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Unlike Carroll’s relationship with Alice Liddell, however, research reveals little evidence
which indicates that Baum knew a little girl name Dorothy. Some, like biographer Katherine
Rogers, suggest that in an era with extremely high infant mortality rates, Baum named his
heroine after his baby niece who tragically passed in infancy (89). Nevertheless, perhaps one of
the most influential female figures in his life and his fiction was his mother-in-law, Matilda
Gage. Mrs. Gage was a bright, successful, early feminist leader of the late nineteenth- and early
twentieth-century. A prominent suffragette, Matilda Gage collaborated with famous female
leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony during the American Women’s Right’s movement. Though there seems to be some discrepancy among critics regarding what exactly Baum’s feelings towards his in-laws were, most seem to agree that he spent significant time with her. Most critics also agree that Matilda Gage can most likely be credited as the force who encouraged Baum to pen and publish his *Oz* stories. Adventurous heroines, strong female characters, and traces of feminism certainly have their place in Oz, but whether these elements promote the suffragette or satirically poke fun at her seems up for debate. Martin Gardner, in his essay, “The Wizard of Oz and Who He Was”, matter-of-factly explains that “Baum’s mother-in-law was a prominent feminist, a fact that may help explain his dislike of the New Woman. Even the Oz books contain many sly digs at the suffragettes, and one book, *The Land of Oz*, is one long satire on the movement” (Gardner 23). Gardner believes that these female rulers of Oz function as dictators and that “the husbands of Oz are forced to take over all the former duties of their wives” (23). By contrast, biographer Rebecca Loncraine suggests that the presence of these strong female characters in Oz instead praise the feminist movements and support the suffragettes. Loncraine even cites a recorded quotation from Baum, speaking fondly of his mother-in-law:

“[She is] undoubtedly one of the most remarkable women of her age, possessed of the highest literary ability, the brightest thoughts, the clearest and most scholarly oratory, the most varied research and intelligent and diversified pen of any public woman in the past twenty years” (139).

Where Gardner’s assertion that these figures are satirical, Loncraine certainly seems to provide sound evidence that they are genuine praises of his mother-in-law’s cause, though when assessing authorial intention, no reader can truly be certain. Readers often are unsure of what to
make of the book’s female heroine, along with the dominating forces of powerful witches in Oz (i.e. the famous Glinda of the North and the Wicked Witch of the West being the most remembered of these). Regardless of what Baum intended to communicate by including these characters, however, the ongoing feminist movement surrounding him clearly permeated his work in the form of female characters. The fact that Baum chose to focus his fairy-tale on the adventures of one little girl, though as far as the historian knows, he personally knew no little girls on which to base his character, may not only be a blatant nod to Alice, but also to the challenging ideologies of American womanhood and feminism.

The American woman of the late nineteenth-century, women like Matilda Gage, and even her daughter, Maud, challenged the conventional standards of womanhood, namely those popular thirty years prior in Victorian England. That is, though the fiction of both Baum and Carroll essentially represent the ideal, iconic childhood of their respective eras and cultures, and despite their similar focus on the adventures of female protagonists, their heroines ultimately communicate very different ideological approaches to the concept of femininity and childhood. Alice’s femininity is for the most part, defined by her Victorian setting. In fact even the concept of using a heroine in literature to portray a societal ideal was not uncommon at this time. Victorian writers Sarah Stickney Ellis and John Ruskin both, on separate occasions acknowledge the value of the heroine. Ruskin compares the heroines and heroes of Shakespeare, asserting that while Shakespeare’s heroes are often deeply flawed characters, the poet’s women are perfect and exactly what they ought to be. He writes that “there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope and errorless purpose… [they] are all faultless: conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity” (“Sesame and Lilies: Of Queens’ Gardens” 1545).
Upholding this view in the perfection, or at least universal appreciation, of woman as the ideal humanity, Sarah Stickney Ellis makes a similar point:

“Look at all the heroines, whether of romance or reality—at all the female characters that are held up to universal admiration—at all who have gone down to honoured graves, amongst the tears and the lamentations of their survivors…they have…been women who were dignified with the majesty of moral greatness” (“The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits” 1526).

According to the Victorians then, and those who preceded them, the kind, nurturing, composed woman is the ideal image of humanity. This notion of course, may harmonize with the simultaneous Victorian obsession with the child. Thus, Alice, as both child and female, functions as a heroine even more perfect than Shakespeare’s heroines or the literary women “held up to universal admiration”. Despite Alice’s confusion in Wonderland, she consistently maintains her feminine virtues of politeness, kindness, and self-control. For instance, when a temperamental, hookah-smoking caterpillar frustrates Alice, she bites her tongue and “[swallows] down her anger as well as she [can]” (Carroll 69). Several other scenarios come up when Alice tries to console other creatures or avoid offending them. By Victorian standards then, we might conclude that the ideal citizen is a child, and that the ideal child is female. Thus, in addition to working in a genre which lends itself to the communication of ideology, Lewis Carroll also employs a literary heroine who, as the societal ideal, holds a similar function as ideological vessel to promote the values and morality of a particular culture.

In the function as servant of ideology, Baum’s Dorothy matches Carroll’s Alice. However, the late nineteenth-century opinion of the American population in the years leading up to the publication of Oz, a new and challenging feminist movement was on the rise. Though
women may still have been held to a high moral standard, similar to that of the Victorian women, the American women sought to break out of the domestic sphere of the home and into the men’s world of politics and business. Friends of Matilda Gage, like Susan B. Anthony express this desire for female power in her 1875 essay, “Social Purity”, when she asks, “why is it that man can hold woman to this high code of morals…and so surely and severely punish her for every departure, while she is so helpless, so powerless to check him in his license, or to extricate herself from his presence and control?” (qtd. in The Essential Feminist Reader 90). Where Victorians like Ruskin and Ellis praised woman for her moral superiority to man, American Anthony asserts that woman’s high morality is of no use if it cannot be applied except under the supervision and dominion of man. This perspective appears in Baum not merely by the inclusion of strong female characters like dominating witches, but most obviously in Dorothy’s comparison to Alice.

Like Oz, Wonderland might also be viewed as a world dominated by women. The rulers of Wonderland take form in the cross and antagonistic Queen of Hearts and a loud, ugly Duchess, constantly in an irritated or disturbed disposition. Though men are present in Wonderland, they are weak in power and dominance compared to the women, the King of Hearts, for instance, has no actual kingly power, but instead is nervously squished under the thumb of his queen. In Alice’s experience in Wonderland, she is constantly being told what to do and how to behave by these overpowering women, for example in a croquet game with a certain Queen of Hearts who beheads anyone who happens to offend her. Still, despite Alice’s confusion in Wonderland, she consistently maintains her feminine virtues of politeness, kindness, and self-control. For instance, during croquet, when she asked “how do you like the Queen?” Alice begins by saying “not at all, she’s so extremely…” and then upon the approach of
the Queen behind her, redirects her answer to “…likely to win, that it’s hardly worth while finishing the game” (Carroll 114). By Victorian standards then, we might conclude that the preferred citizen is a child, and that the ideal child is female. In this setting, however, this ideal image of society, the little girl, is lost in a world of antagonism and rules of social behavior. This antagonism, plays on the Victorian experience of childhood, an experience which would likely be lost to an American reader. W. H. Auden once again provides an eloquent articulation of this strictly English experience of childhood when he acknowledges “the peculiar relation of children and grownups to law and social manners” as the element in *Alice* “most likely to bewilder an American child” (“’Today’s Wonder-World’ Needs Alice” 9). It is the maintenance of rationality, politeness, and self-control of Alice, “while all the other inhabitants [of Wonderland]…are unsocial eccentrics” that would baffle and even frighten an American child. In a Victorian setting, the ideal image of society, the little girl, is lost in a world of antagonism and rules of social behavior. The only way for Alice to free herself from her entrapment in this land of lessons and ridiculous rules is to wake up to her sister assuring her that she had only dreamt it. That is, even upon emerging from this land of submission and correction, the Victorian little girl is still denied the reality of its ridiculousness. Alice exits from Wonderland into a reality which antagonistically beats their set of cultural values associated with femininity and childhood into her in very much the same way.

Despite similarity in concept, Dorothy’s journey through Oz, upon close analysis, is remarkably different from Alice’s experience in Wonderland. Like Wonderland, however, Oz contains very few strong male characters. In fact, critic Russel B. Nye points out that even “the few boys in Oz are girls’ boys, drawn as little girls assume boys should be” (13). Indeed, it would seem that the males in Oz are more in need of Dorothy’s help than she is of theirs. Even
the Wizard is a hoax, who has no actual power of his own to compete with the witches of Oz. Nye asserts that Baum maintains the feminine ideal of childhood by his exclusion of Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn-like characters, who embody the mischievous and energetic nature of boyhood. Rather, the boys in Oz make up “a somewhat bloodless group of younger Prince Charmings” (Nye 13). The majority of characters which Dorothy encounters, male and female, do not remind constantly remind her of her hierarchical status, as the monarchs of Wonderland do, but rather serve as helpful companions, gaily helping her along towards her ultimate journey homeward. Characters like the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and the Cowardly Lion are not rude or condescending as the Caterpillar is to Alice, but rather empowering and supportive of Dorothy and her quest. In the end, Dorothy is finally able to return home by her own power which she had possessed all along and simply been unaware (i.e. clicking her heels together three times). Unlike Alice who is herself powerless to escape Wonderland and ridiculous, nonsensical social rules, Dorothy is not only self-sufficient and able to exit Oz on her own decision, but she is even aided along the way by at least three constant male companions. Thus, lost little Dorothy reflects the early stages of the self-empowered female of the American feminist movement, who autonomously finds her own way home.

Despite the cultural embeddedness of these stories, however, in Victorian and nineteenth-century America, these works are still apt to travel to audiences abroad. For example, where American Martin Gardner may believe that the Alice books cannot possibly be read by children with the same delight with which they were received upon first publication, Rebecca Loncraine (this study’s primary resource for Baum’s biography) is evidence of the cross-cultural interaction of these culturally-specific fairy-tales. Herself, a twentieth-century born Englishwoman who, like Charles Dodgson, holds a degree from Oxford University, Loncraine expresses a personal
preference to the story of Oz. Despite these obvious, intimate ties to Britain’s most beloved fairy-tale writer, Loncraine recalls fond childhood memories of not Wonderland, but Oz: “it seems to have always existed,” she writes, “like our oldest folktales” (Loncraine xii). Loncraine even continues on to claim that “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is so much a part of our culture that we take its existence for granted” (xii). With this point, Martin Gardner would agree. Gardner and Loncraine believe that Oz accesses the universal child experience, and thus is able to transcend both time and culture because children are always the same, no matter their birthplace. Ironically, readers and fans of Lewis Carroll said the same thing about the Alice books that they had read in their childhood. Authors like Virginia Woolf and W. H. Auden have assured the world of Alice’s immortality, only to be countered by Martin Gardner’s 1960 pronouncement that “the time is past when a child under fifteen, even in England, can read Alice with the same delight” (Gardner 7). The belief that children’s fairy-tale continues to exist because all children are the same is simply not true. Even children, as we have seen, are not exempt from culture and thereby, are not exempt from cultural situatedness. In fact, the child of modern children’s fairytale literature has proved to be the perfect vessel for cultural ideology.

Today, Alice and Dorothy remain a part of our contemporary culture because the issues of femininity and childhood which they address continue to be relevant today. For instance, where today’s society may not necessarily experience the same infatuation with children that the Victorian’s had, there seems to be an emerging concern with bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood. That is, recent years have seen acknowledgement of the adolescent and young adult in literature. Where the drive to preserve childhood innocence is not quite as urgent as that of the Victorians, there remains a certain cultural mystification and attraction of adults to childhood and a confusion among adolescents as to which group they belong. Thus, the
characters of Alice and Dorothy whose ages are undefined, may be manipulated to express this phase of nostalgia for childhood while on the brink of adulthood. Because Alice and Dorothy’s ages are not specified, except by their accompanied illustrations from which a reader might speculate, they remain relatable and malleable characters. For instance, we might observe this manipulation in such works like MGM’s film adaptation, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, and Tim Burton’s recent movie, Alice in Wonderland. Here, the little protagonists of Baum’s and Carroll’s fairytales, have transitioned to adolescent, indeed almost womanly, stars on screen. Though for the role of Dorothy, Hollywood originally intended to use America’s favorite childhood icon, Shirley Temple, their choice to use Judy Garland instead subtly affects the story. This minor adjustment changed the plot from the story of a lost, orphaned, but somewhat independent little girl to that of a lost woman, which perhaps welcomed adult audiences back to the story, but also made Dorothy’s experience in Oz seem more bizarre and almost threatening than the imaginative fairy-land of children. Dorothy’s affection for characters like the Scarecrow, for instance, seems more romantic than innocently sweet, and her trained song and dance numbers far more glamorous than the country life of a little girl from Kansas. Similarly, in Tim Burton’s Alice in Wonderland, Carroll’s Alice is played by a young woman, dressed in pretty blue dresses and Hollywood ringlets. Wonderland presented in this adult setting seems far more dramatic than playful, and once again more threatening than silly and nonsensical. Here, the adult Alice seems to blatantly exhibit typical cinematic female sex appeal. For instance, in an advertisement displaying a scene from the movie, observers might notice that as Alice grows and shrinks, her dress remains the same size. Where this may or may not have been a concern for Carroll, applying this idea to a woman produces a rather sexualized result: as she grows, the dress gets tighter and more revealing, and as she shrinks, the dress drapes off her shoulder, also
becoming more revealing. Essentially, Alice and Dorothy have lived on in popular culture through interpretations despite the fading of their original texts because they contribute to ideologies of childhood and feminism which are still alive and transitioning today.

The structure of the modern fairytale is so sound and so sturdy, that often neither reader nor author is aware of the colored spectacles s/he wears. The enchantment of story and narrative in the combined form of fairytale children’s literature exerts a definite hegemonic power, concealing the Wizard figure behind the playful puns and witty wordplay of bedtime stories. Though the ideological lenses of Victorianism and turn-of-the-century America have been switched out and removed from these hegemonic frames, we continue to use these glasses today and gaze through tainted lenses. Though the image has varied slightly, from idolized to independent little girls, and even changed again to images of lost, though ever-glamorous young women, the cultural function of the fairytale remains. The sub-created fairytale, story, and narrative have proven to be essential to society not only for feeding the minds of children, but also for developing cultural identity. In the case of the Ozians, once they’ve removed their glasses, there of course may even be some feelings of foolishness for ever having believed that the city was really emerald in the first place. And yet, for all of those who have gazed through these lenses, not one has denied that the city they present “certainly is a beautiful place.”


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