

Ozflash Revised, Part 1

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Mar 1999

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William H. Ansley — 08 Mar 1999, 01:04

The New Improved Wonderful Eyeflash of Oz
Oz References in "The Eyeflash Miracles" Part 1

First of all, I would like to express my great appreciation to alga, who was kind enough to read over these essays and make useful comments and corrections.

This posting could be considered to be my way of volunteering to answer the FAQ: What are the Oz references in "The Eyeflash Miracles"? (for the second time) except that I doubt it is a question asked very frequently. It is one that interests me, however.

I don't intend on doing a detailed summary of the whole plot of "The Eyeflash Miracles" because it would take too long; I am going to concentrate on the parts with Oz references. But I am also going to single out the places in the text where miracles seem to occur. The miracles often, but not always, seem to be linked with Oz references. For those of you who are interested in my annotations and would like to be able to follow along, I recommend that you re-read the story. Here is where to find it: The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories.

Although I don't really think it is necessary to warn about Wolfe spoilers in postings on this list, I will warn everyone that there will be some *Oz* spoilers before I finish this series of essays.

When I first read "The Eyeflash Miracles" I noticed that it had many references to Oz in it as well as references to many other things, including (not at all surprisingly) a great deal of Christian symbolism. I am not very qualified to discuss the Christian aspects of the story (especially as there are so many others on this list who are), but I am fairly well qualified to discuss the Oz aspects.

As most of you, if not all of you, know The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was just the first of many Oz books that L. Frank Baum wrote, although, because it was made into the very well known film[1] of almost the same name (The Wizard of Oz), it is by far the most famous of his books (he also wrote many non-Oz books, which are even less well known).

The movie version differs from the book in several significant ways. I mention this because Wolfe refers to details from both the book and movie versions of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, as well as The Marvelous Land of Oz (the second Oz book), Ozma of Oz (the third), The Road to Oz (the fifth) and Tik-Tok of Oz (the eighth). I have recently reread the first ten Oz books[2] so I can be pretty sure about these. There may be references to other, later Oz books (in fact I think there is at least one) but not many. Since characters, places and situations recur throughout the Oz series, it certainly would be possible to include more books, but I am trying to include only the first occurrence of each reference.

The most interesting thing to me about the Oz references in "The Eyeflash Miracles" is that even though many of them are so explicit as to be quite obvious and wholly unambiguous

(which is unusual for Wolfe) the boy in the story, George Tibbs (usually referred to as Little Tib) never recognizes any of them. Now, I am willing to accept that, because of his unusual background and upbringing, Little Tib never saw the _Wizard of Oz_ movie or read any of the Oz books, but then why does he see characters from the Land of Oz in his dreams and visions? Although I initially said I didn't know the answer to this question, I now realize a clue is given in the text, which I will point out when I get to it.

An additional, pragmatic reason that Wolfe never has Little Tib refer to any of the Oz characters in the usual, familiar way may be to avoid any possibility of infringing any copyrights or trademarks on the names of the characters. I am not a lawyer, so I don't know if this really could be a problem, but it seems possible.

Another, more general, point of interest for Wolfe fans is the insight it gives us (however slight) into what Wolfe read as a child. That dates of publication of the Oz books by L. Frank Baum range from 1900 to 1920. Other authors[3] continued the series after Baum's death in 1919. The Oz books were extremely popular with children at least through the 1950s and were more or less continuously in print from the time they were published.

Gene Wolfe was born in 1931. By the time he was ten, 35 Oz books had been published. Wolfe certainly read the five Oz books I have indicated above, judging by the references in "The Eyeflash Miracles," and he probably read many more. I also would guess that he was a child when he read them. I say this not only because the Oz books are more likely to appeal to a child than to an adult but because of the details that Wolfe gets wrong in his Oz references. This indicates (to me, at least) that Wolfe is relying on his distinct but imperfect childhood memories of Oz, at least in part.

William Ansley

[1] I am, of course, referring to the 1939 MGM film starring Judy Garland. There were other films with the same name more or less based on the same book.

[2] Here is a list of all the Oz books by L. Frank Baum and their publication dates:

- _The Wonderful Wizard of Oz_ (1900)
- _The Marvelous Land of Oz_ (1904), reprinted as _The Land of Oz_
- _Ozma of Oz_ (1907)
- _Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz_ (1908)
- _The Road to Oz_ (1909)
- _The Emerald City of Oz_ (1910)
- _The Patchwork Girl of Oz_ (1913)
- _Tik-Tok of Oz_ (1914)
- _The Scarecrow of Oz_ (1915)
- _Rinkitink in Oz_ (1916)
- _The Lost Princess of Oz_ (1917)
- _The Tin Woodman of Oz_ (1918)
- _The Magic of Oz_ (1919)
- _Glinda of Oz_ (1920)

There is also _Little Wizard Stories of Oz_ (1913) which is a collection of six short stories about Oz.

[3] There have been over 40 Oz books written altogether, the majority by people other than Baum. The first 40 (known as the Famous Forty) were more or less official and authorized by

Baum or his estate. Later books may not have been authorized. The most prolific of the authorized authors was Ruth Plumly Thompson. I read at least 20 Oz books long ago, from a set owned by my mother.

Roy C. Lackey — 08 Mar 1999, 02:52 · follows William H. Ansley

On 3-8-99 "William H. Ansley" wrote:

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FAQ: What are the Oz references in "The Eyeflash Miracles"? (for the second time) except that I doubt it is a question asked very frequently. It is one that interests me, however.<<

Stop apologizing and get on with it! <g>

I have never read the Oz stories (and am too old to start now), but I still enjoy your commentary. I have seen the movie, of course, but that was back in the '50s. Even so, I still knew there were obvious references to Oz in _Eyeflash_. Heinlein did it too.

Roy