

Ozflash Revised, Part 7 (The End!)

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William H. Ansley — 17 Mar 1999, 23:48

The New Improved Wonderful Eyeflash of Oz
Oz References in "The Eyeflash Miracles" Part 7
The Slam-bang Conclusion!

There is a long complex scene where Little Tib's father tries to explain why he tried to kill him. When Little Tib touches his father's face, his father seems to be wearing a thin, plastic mask, under which is a hard metal face. Little Tib tries to change his father back to the way he remembers him in "the old place" the first home Little Tib can remember. He feels great pressure building up in his chest, just under his breastbone. And he experiences some of the same symptoms that he did when the gas grenade stopped working--his nose fills with mucus, his mouth with saliva--but there is no tear gas this time. Then the pressure in his chest bursts out in a flood of tears. The metal mask flies off his father's face and clangs on the stage. When Little Tib feels his father's face it is back to normal. But this time Little Tib's miracle doesn't seem to work. While his father is still trying to justify himself, Little Tib hears the sword slowly scraping along the stage. Fearing his father will strike again, Little Tib runs away, heedless of what he may run into.[27]

He runs into Nitty, who has been looking for him, but Nitty never thought Little Tib would have stayed out on the stage in the rain, so he didn't look for him there. Nitty takes him back to the motel room.

I have fallen a little behind in counting miracles. By my count, the Metal Man saving Little Tib from the sword (which I described in the previous segment) is the sixth miracle and Little Tib's attempt to transform (reform?) his father is the seventh, even though it seems to fail.

Late the next morning[28], a nice-smelling woman named Mrs. Munson comes to the motel to take Little Tib to a class for blind children. She says she was asked to come by the new, acting superintendent, Mr. Parker. Little Tib asks if Mr. Parker got his old job back. Mrs. Munson says she doesn't know if he had the job before, but when the computer was found to be inoperative, Mr. Parker presented his credentials as an educational programmer and offered to help. After school another, thicker woman, whose name Little Tib can never remember afterward, takes him to her home, apparently a foster home. Little Tib isn't very happy there. This woman takes Little Tib to school in the mornings and brings him home in the afternoons.

On the fifth day, Little Tib hears his father's voice in the school. His father is calling himself Mr. Jefferson. He tells the school officials he is a government agent (which, as far as we know, is true) and takes Little Tib away with him. He tells Little Tib he is going to bring him to Niagara for examination.

While Little Tib is being led to his father's car, he sees a little man walking in front of him. The little man turns around to face Little Tib, walking backwards. He has a bald head with upcurling hair on the sides, a large hooked nose and dark eyes that seem almost as if they are going to

shoot sparks, but he does not look cruel. He is wearing a green coat with two sparkling green buttons and long tails.

"And what can I do for you?" he asked Little Tib.
"Get me loose," Little Tib said. "Make him let go of me."
"And then what?"
"I don't know," Little Tib confessed.

The man in the green coat nodded to himself as if he had guessed that all along, and took an envelope of silver paper out of his inside coat pocket. "If you are _caught_ again," he said, "it will be for good. Understand? Running is for people who are not helped." He tore one end of the envelope open. It was full of glittering powder, as Little Tib saw when he poured it out into his hand. "You remind me," he said, "of a friend of mine named _Tip_. Tip with a _p_. A _b_ is just a _p_ turned upside down." He threw the glittering powder into the air, and spoke a word Little Tib could not quite hear.

Little Tib is transported back in time to the classroom where/when his father came for him. This happens slowly; the present sort of slides and fades away while the past slides and fades in. While this is happening, he hears the little man's voice say, (even though the little man has disappeared) "Tip turned out to be the ruler of us all in the end, you know." Then Little Tib hears the beating of big wings.

Little Tib is in the classroom and he hears his father's voice. This time his father is calling himself George Tibbs and he says he is Little Tib's father. He tells a school official that he is with the federal government and starts to talk about a case he is working on. But before he says anything, he suggests Little Tib wait outside. Mrs. Munson leads Little Tib to a chair in the hallway and tells him to wait there.

Little Tib thinks about Krishna and decides that Krishna probably didn't run away. He thinks about Jesus and how Jesus fled into Egypt but came back, not to Bethlehem (where he had fled from) but to Nazareth, because it was his real home.

The chair was hard--harder than any rock he had ever sat on. He felt the unyielding wood of its arms stretching to either side of him while he thought. There was something horrible about those arms, something he could not remember.

The bell rings and children start to leave the school. Little Tib gets up and leaves with them. He hears a train whistle and turns towards the sound. He prefers to walk along train tracks rather than roads because he is less likely to meet people and it is less dangerous. After walking a long distance he finds his way to the tracks. Along the way, he picks up a stick, with which to feel his way. He climbs the embankment the train tracks are on and begins to walk along the rails, balancing with his stick. He can see a little girl ahead of him. Because he can see her, he knows she's an angel.

"What's your name?" he said.
"I mustn't tell you," she answered, "but you can call me Dorothy." She asked his and he did not say George Tibbs but Little Tib, which was what his mother and father had always called him.

Dorothy tells Little Tib that she is going with him because he fixed her leg, although Little Tib doesn't think she sounds like the same girl. (Remember, Little Tib couldn't see the girl whose leg he healed.) She says she can help him and tell him what to look out for. She says there is a man up ahead.

"A bad man?" Little Tib asked, "or a good man?"
"A nice man. A shaggy man."

The man turns out to be Nitty. He says he is surprised to see Little Tib, although he supposes he shouldn't be. He also says that Mr. Parker seems to have forgotten all about getting him his old job back. Little Tib introduces Dorothy to Nitty.

Nitty said, "I can't see any Dorothy, George." His voice sounded funny.
"Well, I can't see you," Little Tib told him.
"I guess that's right. Hello, Dorothy. Where are you an' George goin'?"
"We're going to Sugarland," Little Tib told him. "In Sugarland they know who you are."

Sugarland, Texas, is where the first home Little Tib can remember, the "old place," is located.

The light of the sun, now setting, made the railroad ties as yellow as butter. Nitty took Little Tib's hand, and Little Tib took Dorothy's, and the three of them walked between the rails. Nitty took up a lot of room, but Little Tib did not take much, and Dorothy hardly took any at all. When they had gone half a kilometer, they began to skip.

The lines I have quoted above are the last lines of The Eyeflash Miracles. I don't know if Wolfe intended this, but they make me feel optimistic about the fate of Little Tib and Nitty, which is one reason I am so fond of this story.

The eighth miracle is Little Tib going back in time [29] to replay his father coming to school and making it come out differently. The little man he sees just before this happens (the "angel" who seems to make it happen) is the Wizard of Oz himself, as he appears in the John R. Neill illustrations, specifically. Of course the Wizard appears in the book The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and the movie. In both, he leaves in his balloon, without taking Dorothy with him. The Wizard doesn't appear again until the fourth book, Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz, although he is mentioned in the second and third books. He appears in all of the remaining Oz books by Baum.

The Tip the Wizard mentions is a boy (full name Tippetarius) who appears in the second Oz book, The Marvelous Land of Oz. This whole book builds up to the surprise of Tip's real identity. It turns out Tip was enchanted while a baby by an evil witch named Mombi. Tip is really Ozma, the rightful ruler of Oz, who was hidden by being turned from a baby girl to a baby boy and who was then raised by the witch in a very isolated part of Oz (in Gillikinland). In the original version of events (as given in The Marvelous Land of Oz), the Wizard is responsible for stealing baby Ozma, turning her over to old Mombi and persuading Mombi to enchant and hide her. But, via Baum's "revisionist history" in Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz, the Wizard becomes blameless (Mombi was acting on her own) and he is invited to stay in the Emerald City

by Ozma as the official Wizard.

The *The Marvelous Land of Oz* ends with Tip being restored to his rightful form and status in Oz. The fact that Ozma was a boy is why I said, in Part 2 of my essay, that Little Tib had a reason to refer to the beautiful woman in his dream (whom I identified as Ozma) as a "king."

I find it quite amusing that the Wizard's final statements seem to conflate Ozma and Christ. The Wizard says Little Tib reminds him of Tip. Little Tib is a Christ-like figure (or possibly Christ, see below). Tip becomes/is Ozma the "ruler of us all" in Oz, just as Christ becomes/is God, the ruler of us all on earth. (I am adopting the Christian point of view here for the sake of the argument, although I don't necessarily share it.)

I am not sure what the sound of the beating of big wings is. In *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, Tip, with the help of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow creates a bizarre flying contraption with big wings made out of palm fronds to escape from the palace in the Emerald City, which is besieged by an enemy army. This may be what Wolfe has in mind here, but I don't have any great confidence in this guess.

I quoted the passage about the chair Little Tib is sitting in after he is told to wait at the school because it took me a long time to figure it out, much longer than it probably should have. But now it seems obvious to me that horrible thing Little Tib is being reminded of, but cannot remember, is the wooden arms of the cross of the crucifixion, stretching out on either side of Jesus. This passage can be interpreted to mean that Little Tib is remembering being crucified and therefore is Christ come again, but I don't think this is a necessary interpretation. He may just be almost remembering what he knows about the crucifixion.

The little girl who Little Tib sees on the railroad tracks is, of course, Dorothy Gale, the little Kansas girl who first makes the trip to Oz in a cyclone in the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and, of course, in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. But she is not quite Dorothy. She implies that her name is something else, although I have no idea what it might really be. She also identifies herself as the girl whose leg Little Tib healed in the doctor's office, although she doesn't really seem to be that girl, either.

The final Oz character referred to in *The Eyeflash Miracles* is the Shaggy Man. A character with this name first appears in *The Road to Oz*, the fifth Oz book. He is a hobo Dorothy meets in Kansas, near her Uncle's farm, when she is trying to find her way home. He and Dorothy become magically lost and, after many adventures, find their way to Oz, just in time for Ozma's birthday party. The Shaggy Man appears in most of the Oz books that follow *The Road to Oz*, at least briefly.

Wolfe breaks the pattern of the story here. Until this point, all of the Oz characters were in Little Tib's dreams or visions and they had very little, if any lasting reality in the "real" world of the story. But Nitty is a real person and he also is identified with an Oz character.

Wolfe's portrayal, in words and actions, of the Oz characters he refers to varies. Although the gnomes act pretty much as Baum's gnomes would, they don't talk the way Baum's gnomes did. Tik-tok's actions and speech are quite close to Baum's version although Wolfe does not adapt Baum's annoying gimmick of putting a hyphen between each syllable of polysyllabic words to indicate Tik-tok's monotonous way of speaking. It gets ti-re-some ve-ry quick-ly. Since Wolfe's Cowardly Lion doesn't speak and is only shown dancing, a comparison with Baum's version is difficult, but they have the ribbon in the mane in common. The Scarecrow is very well portrayed and is closer to the version in Baum's books than in the movie. After all, he mentions that the Wizard has already given him his brains[30]. Considering how short a time he appears in the

story, Wolfe manages very well to capture the essence of the Tin Woodman as he appears in the movie and Baum's books too, since his character is quite similar in both. The Wizard also appears briefly and is well portrayed by Wolfe, matching the Wizard from Baum's Oz books rather than the movie version. Dorothy isn't quite the Dorothy of the movie or Baum's books, since she is also somehow the girl whose leg Little Tib healed, but she doesn't really say or do anything out of character. The Shaggy Man is a special case, since he is really Nitty, but since they are both hoboes, there is a certain correspondence there as well.

I have taken much longer than I intended to finish this essay. (If it can be called finished; I think it still needs some revision. But I think I need to call a halt at this point, at least for the moment.) I hope that anyone who has read this far has gotten some information and enjoyment out of it.

William Ansley

[27] In this last paragraph I have been doing more interpretation of the text than before in order to summarize more effectively, since Wolfe leave many things unsaid. It is not absolutely sure that Little Tib is trying to work a miraculous change in his father in the scene I describe, nor that his father is definitely trying to kill him again. But his father is still trying to justify himself even after his metal mask is removed, which is an indication that he hasn't really changed.

[28] Wolfe seems to be making a subtle joke here based on a nursery rhyme. When they leave for the school Little Tib asks Mrs. Munson if it is noon, since it seems too hot to be morning. She answers that Mr. Parker called her at ten o'clock, but she couldn't leave the school until now.

A diller, a dollar,
A ten o'clock scholar.
What makes you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o'clock,
But now you come at noon.

[29] This certainly foreshadows how Wolfe treats miracles and miracle working in The Book of the New Sun.

[30] In the book The Wonderful Wizard of Oz the Wizard actually fills the Scarecrow's head with bran (mixed with pins and needles to give him sharp wits) instead of handing him a diploma and making a speech. (Yes, I know--I like the movie version better, too.) Not surprisingly, Baum's description of exactly what the Scarecrow's brains are made of changes from book to book later in the series.