

# Job Behind The Curtain

by David H. Lowrey

It seems that not a week goes by without hearing somewhere quotation from L.

Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Just how did this child's story become so universally accepted? Baum claimed that the tale that would become *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* came to him as he commenced telling his children a yarn extemporaneously. He realized he had started to create an exceptional world so before it was lost forever, Baum immediately started writing down this narrative. Lets examine just how Baum, who never became an distinguished writer, turned his moment of inspiration into a story that for over a century has captured the imagination of young and old throughout the world.

From the book *The Annotated Wizard of Oz* there is a letter by Baum dated 1916 in which he articulates some of his difficulties in creating a story:

“A lot of thought is required on one of these fairy tales. The odd characters are a sort of inspiration, liable to strike at any time, but the plot and plan of adventures takes me considerable time to develop . . .”

How Baum resolved “the plot and plan of adventure” in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* can be found in *The Pilgrim's Progress Part Two*, by John Bunyan, (Pub.1684.) from which Baum borrows episode by episode.<sup>1</sup> However, he did transform this spiritual pilgrimage into his delightful topsy-turvy quest from a dull gray Kansas to the enchanted Land of Oz and back.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* Part two begins with Christiana, accompanied by her sons and a neighbor going on a pilgrimage from the *City of Destruction* to the *Celestial City* where they will be reunited with her husband. Similarly, Dorothy is also on a pilgrimage of reunion as she treks from munchen land to the *Emerald City* to be finely reunited with her family back in Kansas. In both books the heroines must survive various trials and meet an assortment of curious people and fantastic creatures some with noticeable similarity.

Baum constructed the first third of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* from the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, without even so much as changing the order of the incidents. Among some striking parallels found in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the lion who “at every Roar that it gave, it made the Valley echo . . .” but drew back immediately drew back when met with opposition; behavior that is reminiscent of how Baum's Cowardly Lion behaved .<sup>2</sup> Both stories also tell of an encounter with some composite monsters. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* “The *Monster* was like

unto no one Beast upon Earth. Its Body was like a Dragon, and it had seven Heads and ten Horns . . .” In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, we find Kalidahs described as “two great beasts with bodies like bears and heads like tigers.”

Additionally, in both books, the travelers find themselves in [an enchanted patch of ground]. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* the “*enchanted Ground*, where the air naturally tended to make one *Drowzy*,” is enchanted by a witch. It is by Virtue of her *Sorceries* (the witch is named Madam Bubble) that this Ground is *enchanted*;<sup>3</sup> – in the 17th century bubbles were associated with witches.<sup>3</sup> For the travelers in Oz, it is the poppy field where Dorothy, Toto and the Lion fall asleep. Baum says “Now it is well known that when there are many of these flowers together their odor is so powerful that anyone who breathes it falls asleep.”

A pilgrimage is often used as a metaphor for the passage of one’s life from birth to death. Bunyan must have drawn on his own spiritual struggles for inspiration. In Gordon Wakefield’s book *Bunyan the Christian*, we learn that the Protestant reformers looked upon Catholic pilgrimages “as ‘fooleries’ at best, and at worst occasions of gross superstition and scandal, tending to idolatry, the veneration of images and relics . . .” For Protestants a pilgrimage was an internal quest. Baum, was raised as a Methodist and insisted that his make believe land of *OZ* be considered a real place for children to go.

Both *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are quests for supernatural justice, mercy and salvation with one great difference. “I espied a little before me a cave, where two giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old time, by whose power and tyranny the men whose bones, blood, etc., lay there, were cruelly put to death.” One can see from this quote, that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is an exclusive quest limited to only the right sort of Christian. Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is an all-embracing quest open to all who will simply believe in its wise message, to believe in yourself.

Why did Frank Baum use the parallels with *The Pilgrim’s Progress*? From his letter above, he clearly needed the established narration to drape his story on. It is interesting that he did not attempt to switch any of the episodes. However, Baum completely transformed the mood in which the action takes place. He interchanged what was a serious narrative on spiritual salvation into a topsy-turvy pilgrimage in which Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion attain internal awareness and growth.

At this point, Baum has his narrative and inspired characters, but where could he place them, what is the nature of their fantasy world, what is the name? We know that Baum’s mother was a devout Methodist and was troubled by her son’s disregard for conventional religion. He enjoyed teasing her with fictitious biblical citations. Baum, having growing up in nineteenth century America in a devout Protestant home would have been familiar with two books, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the *Bible*.

Since Baum enjoyed manipulating biblical quotation, as Baum clearly borrows from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, why not from one of the books from the Bible? Perhaps the most famous book in the Bible is *The Book of Job*, which begins with this line: “There was a man in the land

of Uz . . . ” Uz is pronounced Oz. There are also other interesting comparisons that suggest that Baum derived inspiration from *The Book of Job* .

*The Book of Job* is classified as one of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament, meaning a practical guide to a successful and happy life. However, *The Book of Job* is really quite the contrary. It's a non-wisdom wisdom book; there are no practical answers here for innocent suffering. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is truly a Wisdom Book for children and the young at heart. However, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is full of contrarian characters and action, which it shares with *The Book of Job*.

*The Book of Job* is called the greatest poem ever written, but it is also the greatest mystery story. Why do bad things happen to good people? Apparently even Job's name is something of a mystery for it may mean “hostile” or contrarily “penitent.” The maxims from *Job* are contrarian; “Job's comforter” is a person who antagonizes while pretending to comfort; Job's friends, ( like Dorothy, he has three ), think they have insight into apparent innocent suffering, but in reality, they don't. Dorothy's friends believe they possess no insight at all, but they actually do. A brainless Scarecrow conceives all the ideas. A heartless Tin Man has all the compassion; the Cowardly Lion aggressively defends his friends from two fierce Kalidahs.

The term “patience of Job,” is a misnomer since Job is constantly protesting, and is actually impatient. In *The Book of Job* the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man. . . .’ Dorothy being a very young child is also blameless. Satan challenged God to test Job's faith by putting him through an ordeal. One should visualize the character of Satan<sup>5</sup> ( Satan means an “adversary” in Hebrew) in this book as something like an undercover police officer. He spies on people and tempts them for God, not the representative of the supreme evil spirit, the Devil. God allows Satan to expose Job to various trials, including the death of his children and the loss of all his wealth. Dorothy is separated from her family by an act of God, in the form of a cyclone.<sup>6</sup> A cyclone is an appropriate metaphor for an act of God, a strong, unpredictable force of nature. God appears several times in the Bible in the form of a whirlwind, or a cyclone, including the *Book of Job*. Job has his antagonist in Satan while Dorothy, of course is the Wicked Witch. Dorothy whose name means “gift of God” is truly a blessing for the inhabitants of Oz, for contrary to reason, this innocent child accidentally destroys both the evil Witches of the East and West.<sup>7</sup> Dorothy is brought to the land of Oz to be exposed to various trials. Oz means strength in Hebrew, and Dorothy indeed grows stronger in wisdom from her pilgrimage through this enchanted land of trials.

Now, enter Job's pretentious friends who ineptly try to console him with numerous, yet empty speeches of orthodox beliefs. Through many arguments with his friends Job maintains his innocence. Baum, the master of contrariness, has Dorothy's unpretentious friends help her by their direct action. When God finally speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, he goes on to explain that he made everything on earth, and how insignificant humans are. Some scholars have interpreted this speech as God saying that humans are no different from any other of God's creations. It is interesting that in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy travels to the Emerald

City accompanied by a scarecrow, a tin man, and a lion. Could the straw scarecrow represent flora, the tin man minerals and the lion fauna, is Baum saying that all of God's creations are equal in this land of Oz? One could argue that Dorothy's determination, combined with the Scarecrow's brains, the Tin man's heart and the Lion's courage form the complete person. Their final triumph is only possible when they work together.

*The Book of Job* ends with the grandest contrarian finish possible as God rebukes Job's friends for their naive orthodoxy in thinking that we are punished and rewarded according to our actions here on earth. After Job repents of his sins, the Lord does exactly what he criticized Job's friends for believing, 'the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, 'giving him twice as much as he had before his ordeal, including seven new sons and three new daughters. Some scholars call this the "Hollywood ending." Thus, one can say both *The Book of Job*, and *The Wizard of Oz* received a "Hollywood ending." However, it is difficult to understand what the author of *The Book of Job* is really saying – for he leaves us wondering: If Job is "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil," as the Lord states in the beginning of the book, why a bet between the Lord and Satan at all? The author makes it appear as though the Lord is indifferent to any emotional attachment Job and his wife may have had to their first children.

This last bit of contrariness which has nothing to do with the *Wizard of Oz*, but is interesting, from Jack Miles book, *God, a Biography*:

... God's last words are those he speaks to Job, the human being who dares to challenge not his ( God's) physical power but his moral authority. Within the Book of Job itself, God's climactic and overwhelming reply ( out of the whirlwind ) seems to silence Job. But reading from the end of the Book of Job onward, (in the Hebrew Bible) we see that it is Job who has somehow silenced God. God never speaks again, and he is decreasingly spoken of.

Baum's fascination with the topsy-turvy is literally illustrated in his book *Tik-Tok of Oz* written in 1914, in which Baum designed a map of the land of *Oz* show, of course, everything that should be in the east, MUNCHKIN COUNTRY, is located in what one would expect to be the west.

In the end the Wizard of Oz himself turns out to be a humbug of a wizard. However, he is a great teacher by showing that all we need is to believe in ourselves, and in our own topsy-turvy lives. We too can reach our own dull gray Kansas. Kansas is a state of mind. Both *The Book of Job* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* tell us that we must believe without understanding. We must have faith. Could it be that by drawing on two old stories Baum infused his tale with their enduring truths. Coupled with his mastery of the topsy-turvy and truly inspired, unique characters with their inability to see themselves objectively a property we all share. Baum created an ironic and timeless children's book of wisdom.

1 See J. Karl Franson Article, *From Vanity Fair to Emerald City*

2 A possible inspiration for the Scarecrow can be found in the character Master Feeblemind, “ I am a man of no strength at all, of Body, nor yet of Mind . . .” The Tin man may have been inspired from two characters name Great-heart and No-heart.

3 In Macbeth act 1; “witches vanish like bubbles into the air,” Macbeth act 4 ; the three witches say “Double, double toil and trouble; fire burn, cauldron bubble.”

4 L. Frank Baum Creator of Oz, page 66

5 Satan appears in Job , along with the sons of God, Satan is delegated to informing God about human frailties, it only later in the Bible that he becomes demonic.

6A cyclone is a great whirlwind, and the term whirlwind is used in the Bible several times as a setting of theophanies, i.e., divine appearances.

7 Dorothy in Baum’s book is only about five years old.

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