



L. Frank Baum: Creator of Oz

Katharine M. Rogers

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Since it was first introduced over a hundred years ago in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, L. Frank Baum's world of Oz has become one of the most enduring and beloved creations in children's literature. It has influenced numerous prominent writers and intellectuals, and become a lasting part of the culture itself.

L. Frank Baum was born in 1856 in upstate New York, the seventh child of a very successful barrel-maker and later oil producer. However, Baum's own career path was a rocky one. Beginning as an actor, Baum tried working as a traveling salesman, the editor of a small town newspaper and the publisher of a trade journal on retailing, failing to distinguish himself in any occupation. His careers either failed to provide a sufficient living for his beloved wife Maud and their children or were so exhausting as to be debilitating. In the 1890's, L. Frank Baum took the advice of his mother-in-law, suffragist leader Matilda Gage, and turned his attention to trying to sell the stories he'd been telling to his sons and their friends. After a few children's books published with varying success, he published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900 and it quickly became a bestseller and has remained so ever since.

In this first full-length adult biography of Baum, Rogers discusses some of the aspects that made his work unique and has likely contributed to Oz's long-lasting appeal, including Baum's early support of feminism and how it was reflected in his characters, his interest in Theosophy and how it took form in his books, and the celebration in his stories of traditional American values. Grounding his imaginative creations, particularly in his fourteen Oz books, in the reality of his day, Katharine M. Rogers explores the fascinating life and influences of America's greatest writer for children.

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