

Physical Disability and Prostheses in L. Frank Baum's Oz Series -- Gothic Fable?

Authors Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, Beatrix Potter, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling emerged during the Victorian/Edwardian period providing exciting texts with a moralizing tone. Children were taught societal views of disability, prostheses portrayed as frightening extensions of negative character. Close analysis of L. Frank Baum's Oz series will illustrate how these books slot into the Gothic genre and the author's promotion of the cultural view of the physically disabled's otherness.

Did Baum's complex perceptions of physical disability in the Oz series shape societal beliefs or were they merely reflections of existing cultural attitudes? Well known for his support of the women's suffrage movement and pacifism, Baum also promoted extermination of all Native Americans in two newspaper editorials. Using a Gothic lens, Oz characters that are outside 'physical normalcy' have moderated success. From the Tin Woodman to the Wheelies, Baum created fantastical characters with prostheses, which also served as their fundamental flaws. This paper considers what cultural lesson underlies Baum's characterizations.