

"The Troubled Waters of Oz: L. Frank Baum's Ever-Shifting Currents of Change"

Water is often used as a powerful symbolic element in fantasy literature. Its physical and "spiritual" properties regularly become the object of bent-rules and subverted realities in tales for which few things are as they seem. The presence of water can signal opportunity for change, a space for cleansing; it can give and take life; it may rush a hero towards his destiny with victory or thrash his raft to the edge of a waterfall, anticipating imminent death and despair.

While L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* may be quite clear in the power that water has to cleanse its world of evil -- tiny Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch with a single washbucket, after all -- the remainder of the Oz series (as written by Baum) offers a more complicated set of suggestions for the powers that water may hold. In an exploration of the ways in which Baum utilizes the shifting-symbol of water as both giver and thief, this paper considers the various categories of water in its physical and spiritual manifestations throughout the Land of Oz from the period of 1900 to 1919. In charting the stages of water as a substance both naturally occurring and one controlled by man, it offers suggestions for Baum's need to alter the relationship of Oz inhabitants to water through the growth of the series and considers what his ever-changing current does to offer consistency within the inconsistency of the great Land of Oz, the world ultimately abandoned by the oceans, and surrounded on all sides by an impenetrable, (almost) uncrossable desert.