

First, a big thanks to Rich and David for providing useful perspectives from which to “launch” our discussion AND a handful of useful “prompts” to help guide our thoughts and explorations.

Peter Widdowson’s discussion of “re-visionary fiction” certainly applies to the two works that came immediately to mind.

I had the chance to see *Wicked* on Broadway during its first year of production and was completely blown away not only by the experience of the production but by Gregory Maguire’s “creative genius” in taking a well known set of children’s books, which do stand in their own right, and the revisionary fiction of the 1939 MGM film *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*) and “retelling” the stories through the eyes of the scariest, most unsavory character.

I was subsequently drawn to Macquire’s other Oz books, which I read, and Baum’s books, which I didn’t. (see notes at end). The 1939 film stands alone as its own revision of Baum’s stories as well as being the basis of story and characters most familiar to the millions who have been rabid fans of the theater production and recent movie spin-offs.

Is this considered great literature or enjoyable entertainment?

I was just the right age (value forming years of early 20’s) to completely immerse myself in *Jesus Christ, Superstar* and its slightly less well known contemporary *Godspell*. In many respects “JCS” was an idea whose time had come. In addition to the intro to the genre of Rock-Opera, JCS clearly provided:

- Education Updating - how many people across the US and UK learned at least a part of the story of Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples, Peter, Mary Magdalene, Judas (and others) and the story of their last trip to Jerusalem through the arc of the play. By the early 1970’s church and “Sunday School” attendance (especially in what were called the “mainline” primarily Protestant denominations in the US, (Churches of England, Scotland, N. Ireland) had already begun its decline. I think that we can call the “Bible” known to Western Christian believers a Masterpiece.
- Political Updating - Vatican II permitted the scriptures to be read in the “vernacular”; many Protestant denominations had turned to the “Revised Standard Version” of the Western canon, finding the King James Version out of touch. (the rise of the Fundamentalists is another matter entirely). A popular book at the time was “Good News for Modern Man”. As the Civil Rights movement took hold in the US, followed by Women’s rights, even LGBTQ+ rights, it was time to consider Jesus’s story in a different context. Much of this work took place during the 20th century - not the least of which including the thoughts of the existentialists following the discovery of the Jewish Holocaust and the Atomic Bomb. Let’s add to that the anti-war sentiments and activism of this time period and you have an environment RIFE for a work of art that takes well worn themes and memes and turns them upside down and inside out.

- (Re) Interpreting - the assumption of permission to convert a “Bible Story” into a Rock Opera moved the needle one step further. Bernstein and Sondheim had taken on Shakespeare through *West Side Story*. There were now bodies of scholarship (e.g. those based on discovery of the scrolls at Naq Hammadi which brought us the Gnostic Gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary Magdalene and Judas).

Taking a look at Question #5, I believe it is important to look at the context in which it was written.

When an artist uses a derivative work to make a statement that could potentially fundamentally change the overt expressive intent of the original, does the resulting tension strengthen, weaken, or have no impact on the power of either piece?

In this case the creators, producers, actors and musicians knew that they were making a statement that would fundamentally change the overt expressive intent of the relevant Chapters of the Christian Bible (both Old and New Testament). I believe that they were aware of the tensions that would arise and (like many) believed that the resulting tensions would strengthen the power of both the original texts and the application of its core purpose, metaphors and themes.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Newcomb

May 10, 2026

Notes:

- I. Understanding Biblical Passages in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*
Jesus Christ, Superstar is primarily based on the canonical Gospels of the New Testament, specifically (Matthew 21–27, Mark 11–15, Luke 19–23, John 12–19).
 - A. Historical and Archeological discoveries of the 20th century
 1. The Dead Sea Scrolls (1947-1956)
 2. The Naq Hammadi Library (1945)
 - B. Advancements in Biblical Scholarship
 1. Markan Priority and “Q”
 2. Non-canonical Gospel documents
 3. Emphasis on oral traditions behind the gospels
 - C. Ongoing Quest for the Historical Jesus
- II. Some important authors and scholars who have written for general audiences
 - A. Karen Armstrong
 - B. Marcus Borg
 - C. Diana Butler Bass
 - D. John Dominic Crossan
 - E. Elaine Pagels
 - F. John Shelby Spong
 - G. N T Wright
 - H. Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute

A Summary of the “OZ Books”

L. Frank Baum	Year	Gregory Maguire	Year
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz	1900	Wicked	1995
The Marvelous Land of Oz	1904	Confessions of an Ugly Step Sister	1999
Ozma of Oz	1907	Son of a Witch	2005
Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz	1908	A Lion Among Men	2008
The Road to Oz	1909	Out of Oz	2011
The Emerald City of Oz	1910	Elphie: a Wicked Childhood	2025
The Patchwork Girl of Oz	1913		
Tik-Tok of Oz	1914		
The Scarecrow of Oz	1915		
Rinkitink in Oz	1916		
The Lost Princess of Oz	1917		
The Tin Woodman of Oz	1918		
The Magic of Oz.	1919		
Glinda of Oz	1920		