

“A Modernized Fairy Tale”: Speculations on Technology, Labor, Politics, & Gender in  
the *Oz* Series

by  
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## ABSTRACT

ZACHARY HEZ HOLLINGSWORTH: "A Modernized Fairy Tale": Speculations on  
Technology, Labor, Politics, & Gender in the *Oz* Series  
(Under the direction of Dr. Jaime Harker)

On the surface, L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series would appear to merely be fourteen books of inventive children's fantasy, but in truth Baum communicates several personal progressive beliefs to his youthful audience through the use of his fantastical world upon closer examination. For my research, I reread every book in Baum's original *Oz* series and made note of any potentially relevant allegorical or metaphorical themes. Once I started to notice a trend of themes regarding technology, labor, politics, and gender, I settled on these themes to be the overall focus of my thesis's discussion. I read as many academic essays and articles on the *Oz* series as I could find, observing previous readings and arguments to better inform my own work. Finally, I read a comprehensive biography on Baum's life to contextualize his perspectives based on when, where, and how he grew up and lived. Overall, I found the *Oz* series to hold a host of interesting ideas and opinions that paint Baum as quite a colorful individual, one interested in the potential for America to change how it operated during his time and hoping to do so by encouraging children to challenge the society of their parents.

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

I think I read my first *Oz* book when I was in elementary school. Appropriately enough, it was the first book in the series: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Similarly to just about anyone else, my first introduction to the Land of Oz was through the 1939 musical film. At the time, I did not know of the film's historical impact on cinema that would ripple out to become almost universally associated with American popular culture, I had simply thought I found a book based on a movie that I enjoyed.

To put it bluntly, my experience with the book was life changing. It was noticeably darker than the film, which while it had its own frightening elements such as talking trees, flying monkeys, and of course the Wicked Witch of the West, even as a child all of these elements were kitschy enough that they did not genuinely scare me. With the book, I actually experienced a constant sense of dread over the situations Dorothy and her friends found themselves in. During one particular chapter, the group had to run away from giant bear-tiger (but for some reason not lion) hybrids called Kalidahs and I distinctly remembering crying as I was reading because I genuinely thought that Dorothy was going to die. Of course she did not, but what surprised me as I took a retrospective look at my experience with the series when I first began my research was how much the *Oz* books scared me, how much they challenged me, and how much they encouraged me to think differently of the interactions I made with the people and world around me.

Although I did not notice it when I was a child, there are several political, cultural, and historical implications sprinkled throughout L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series. The first one that I noticed and found to be the most interesting upon re-reading the series as an adult was from the introduction of the first book, *The Wizard of Oz*, where Baum essentially outlines his motivations for writing the book,

Yet the old time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. Modern education includes morality; therefore the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incident... the story of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" was written solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, pg. 2-3).

While it may not seem so at first glance, this introduction is ironic for several reasons. Primarily, it is odd that Baum claims he did not want to write a story that contained morality messages for children, considering all of the real world themes and ideals he would incorporate throughout the series that would encourage children to think differently from their elders. In Baum's opinion, those running the United States in his time of writing the *Oz* series from 1900-1920 were running it into the ground due to a persistence of maintaining a political, economic, and social consistency that simply did not work anymore. In the present, Baum saw common people working themselves to

death in order to put food on the table, while also warning us of a future where the economy could no longer sustain itself: the Great Depression. I feel that Baum wrote this introduction in the manner that he did to either deflect potential criticism from adults who would not approve of such radical ideas being shifted onto their children, or, even more deviously, to lull children into a false sense of security so that the more frightening elements of the novel would retain their shock value. I am not ashamed to admit that after rereading this series for my research, I audibly laughed at the notion that Baum claimed to do away with “all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale” with “the heartaches and nightmares... left out,” considering how much the series frightened me as a child. However, I do believe that Baum’s use of fear differs heavily from other authors of children’s fairy tales, such as the Brothers Grimm before Baum, who very explicitly used fear in their works to frighten children into proper behavior. As I stated prior, one of the reasons that I was so in love with the *Oz* series at all was simply because it scared me so much as a child. Baum’s texts along with my hyperactive imagination crafted a world with more threats, monsters, and overall just malicious people than I ever thought could be possible, but it all served a purpose. By forcing me to face my fears unhindered, I was able to slowly understand myself and why I was so afraid, a process that, if anything, made me far more courageous than I ever thought I could be. As noted by Bruno Bettelheim in his book *The Uses of Enchantment*,

Those who outlawed traditional folk fairy tales decided that if there were monsters in a story told to children, these must all be friendly---but they missed the monster a child knows best and is most concerned with: the monster he feels



or fears himself to be, and which also sometimes persecutes him. By keeping this monster within the child unspoken of, hidden in his unconscious, adults prevent the child from spinning fantasies around it in the image of the fairy tales he knows. Without such fantasies, the child fails to get to know his monster better, nor is he given suggestions as to how he may gain mastery over it. As a result, the child remains hopeless with his worst anxieties---much more so than if he had been told fairy tales which give these anxieties form and body and also show ways to overcome these monsters. If our fear of being devoured takes the tangible form of a witch, it can be gotten rid of by burning her in the oven (Bettelheim 120).

This is exactly what Baum did for me: he helped me provide form to concepts that I found fearful in order to better understand and face them. Unlike traditional fairy tales, Baum didn't use frightening elements to instill a sense of unconquerable fear in his readers to instill morals and discourage them from certain activities. Instead, Baum showed that fears could be overcome through knowledge, compassion, and bravery – a worthwhile lesson that can be seen from his very first book through Dorothy and her three companions.

However, back when I finished *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as a child I was even more surprised at the next discovery that I made: it was merely the first in a series of fourteen novels total. Thus, I next took the only reasonable course of action and proceeded to rent the next book, followed by the next one, and then the next one after that from a multitude of libraries (I noticed that they became increasingly harder to find) until I had finally finished the series by the time that I had reached middle school.

Despite how much I loved the *Oz* series, there was one aspect of it that I never looked into until I started this thesis, a single question that I simply could not expel from my mind, “Who exactly was L. Frank Baum?” When I was a child, the only knowledge I had of Baum was that he wrote the *Oz* books and he had a funny-sounding name: the same knowledge that I had up until now; that was when I decided to conduct a little research. L. Frank Baum (the “L” being short for Lyman, a name which he hated) “was born on May 15, 1856 in a frame house in Chettenango, New York” (Rogers 1). Baum’s father Benjamin was the classic American businessman, shuffling through several different businesses in order to provide for his family, including at one point becoming a farmer similar to Dorothy’s Uncle Henry, before eventually becoming quite wealthy in his own right: “The young barrel maker turned out to be an enterprising and astute businessman. Although he suffered periodic reverses and was forced to mortgage or sell property, he always recovered up to the time that he became chronically ill” (Rogers 1). Because of this variety in his father’s work, Baum was able to observe a variety of different careers and see the numerous hardships associated with each.

In terms of his own career path, it seemed that Baum was destined to become a writer. When Baum became fascinated by a small printing shop in Syracuse while visiting his father’s workplace, he was so determined to become a printer himself that his father bought him a small, personal printing press when he was fourteen. This eventually led him to start his own newspaper, the *Rose Lawn Home Journal*, with his brother younger brother Harry, who he had taught everything he knew about printing. Baum himself wrote several of the articles in the paper, along with contributions from the rest of his family. He later launched another paper, *The Stamp Collector*, wrote his own

pamphlet about the same hobby, *Baum's Complete Stamp Dealer's Directory*, and ultimately started another journal, *The Empire*. However, Baum's passion for writing was put on hold, at least in its current form, as soon as he found a new interest, one that he would pursue for many years to come: the theater. As a young man, Baum went from theater to theater, troupe to troupe, and manager to manager – all in the hopes of finding his big break. Finally, the manager of a Shakespearean troupe agreed to admit him into the company on the one condition that he acquired his own costumes. Although his father was skeptical of this new life path, he agreed to pay for Baum's extravagant costumes and let him act, provided that he used a stage name as to not soil his family's reputation in the business community. After a string of failures in numerous troupes, Baum opted to take matters into his own hands and made the decision to start his own traveling theater company. While the company began by performing classical plays such as the works of William Shakespeare, Baum eventually tried his own hand as a playwright, his first return to writing in years. This was when Baum found one of his first critical and financial successes through his original play "The Maid of Arran," where "Baum not only wrote the words and music... and managed the company, he played the leading role – all under the name Louis F. Baum." According to Katharine M. Rogers, author of *L. Frank Baum, Creator of Oz: A Biography*, unlike Baum's more fantastical later works, "The play has only the feeblest hints of humor... Rather, Baum's aim, according to the playbill, was 'to Ensnare all hearts and leave an impress of beauty and nobility within the sordid mind of man'" (Rogers 10).

It was during this time that Baum met and eventually married Maud Gage, daughter of famous feminist and women's suffragette Matilda Joslyn Gage. Baum and

Maud partook in a more atypical marital structure from others at the time, with himself being more submissive while his wife was notably assertive. It would appear that Maud and her mother's views had a profound effect on Baum, as he espoused women's rights himself and would eventually incorporate several ideas surrounding feminism and gender theory in his *Oz* books, with several of them featuring female or otherwise queer protagonists. When Maud became pregnant, she encouraged Baum to settle down and find a more permanent location for their future family. They rented a house in Syracuse, Baum gave his leading role to another actor, and he and Maud began to set down their roots. When Baum struggled with finding further success in the theater after "The Maid of Arran," he decided to help work as a salesman for his recently ill and injured father's oil business. Shortly thereafter, Baum and his family moved to South Dakota. It was here that Baum managed a small store called "Baum's Bazaar," where the harsh environment and his tendency to extend customer credits until they eventually went unpaid entirely resulted in him having to close the store. This impoverishment along with the drought-plagued landscapes of the state most likely served as an inspiration for Dorothy's home in Kansas in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Seeking a fresh start, Baum decided to purchase a small local newspaper, the *Dakota Pioneer*, which he renamed the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Editing this paper reignited his passion for writing once again and allowed him to talk about several controversial opinions, such as his support of the women's rights movement and the disestablishment of organized churches. This is similar to his incorporation of "radical" ideas into the *Oz* series later on. Firmly establishing himself as a writer, he moved his family to Chicago where he worked on several other papers. His passion for writing continued to expand further, with Baum eventually trying his hand at

writing a few books of children's nursery rhymes, which eventually led him to write his magnum opus – *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

The incredible thing about Baum and the *Oz* books is how intrinsically linked they are to each other: the latter is noticeably reflective of the former's personal ideas and experiences. Authors often pour much of themselves into their work, but I believe that Baum is different for both how much of his own ideals he incorporated into his book and the unique target audience that he chose to communicate these ideas to. Baum's books cover a variety of adult topics and concepts, from socialism to gender identity – markedly progressive ideals that he was presenting to children raised in a time of very traditional American values, the end result being a series that has less in common with *Alice in Wonderland* and more with *Animal Farm*. Although Baum draws parallels to such heavy concepts in his works through the world and characters he engrosses his readers with, it never feels as if he is attempting to indoctrinate, but rather educate. To me, the *Oz* books were meant to prepare a new generation of children for some frightening years in American history: technological revolution, World War I, and the Great Depression. However, Baum did not want these children to be frightened, nor did he want them to simply perpetuate how the system had operated so far. Instead, Baum wanted this generation of children to be the generation that made change – a youth that could be presented with multiple sects of entirely new ideals that they had the freedom to choose from so that they could create their own future: a better future.

My most shocking discovery as a child came after I had basically become an *Oz* aficionado. Out of everyone that I talked to – my friends, my librarian, and even my teachers – no one had read past the first book except for me. I was devastated. I asked

myself, “How could everyone be missing out on such a great series?” Looking back, I feel that this was one of my main inspirations for writing this thesis at all. I had a criminally unknown, underrated, and overall just unread series and I wanted to change that. The end result is an analysis of the various ideas Baum implemented into his series that I found to be the most interesting.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will be dedicated to technology and labor, where I will discuss incorporations of the then-highly-topical issues. The United States from 1900-1920 witnessed dramatic shifts in both fields, one the one hand experiencing revolutionary progress that required new means of thinking regarding how to manage such rapid change and on the other witnessing massive levels of economic disparity that would eventually help contribute to the Great Depression.

The second chapter will cover Baum’s incredibly varied thoughts and opinions on numerous political systems, means of ruling a nation, and other fields of governmental thought. From populism to socialism, Baum is a rather difficult figure to pin down politically. Because of this, instead of attempting to view the *Oz* series as a mouthpiece for one particular political ideology, I have found it more opportune to view it from a more freeform approach, with Baum continuously adding or changing ideas throughout the series as he deemed fit.

The third and final chapter will examine the several interesting treatises on gender found throughout several books in the *Oz* series. Maud Gage, Baum’s wife, and her mother / Baum’s mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, were noted women’s suffragists who helped influence Baum’s more open thinking surrounding issues such as feminism and gender theory. Surprisingly enough, many of these ideas are incorporated into his

novels in means that are easily understood by children, who Baum would argue were more receptive to different ideas than adults who were already set within their ways.

With this thesis, I hope that readers will understand the importance of L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series, not only as a part of the American literary canon of fantasy literature for both children and adults, but also as a tool that encourages young readers to think differently about the world around them, the people around them, and even themselves, all while also providing a glimpse into the mind of one of the most fascinating authors of all time.

## CHAPTER I: TECHNOLOGY & LABOR

The first book in L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is to be considered crucial in the author's discussion of labor to due its introduction of Dorothy, her family, and the economical class they reside in. From the very first page of the book, the family is identified by their lower, working class status and the poor conditions that they live in due their inability to afford more:

Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and Aunt Em, who was the farmer's wife. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon many miles. There were four walls, a floor and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty looking cookstove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. Uncle Henry and Aunt Em had a big bed in one corner, and Dorothy a little bed in another corner. There was no garret at all, and no cellar--except a small hole dug in the ground, called a cyclone cellar, where the family could go in case one of those great whirlwinds arose, mighty enough to crush any building in its path. It was reached by a trap door in the middle of the floor, from which a ladder led down into the small, dark hole (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 4-5).

They are a family that lives on the absolute bare minimums; sharing what little space they have just in order to survive. Their survival is made all the more arduous by the outside environment they are forced to work in. As stated in the first chapter,



When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached to the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 5).

Dorothy's family resides in the middle of Kansas dry country, a landscape that exudes an inhospitable air seeking to destroy anything attempting to hold on to dear life. The entire landscape is dead, making Uncle Henry's work all the more challenging. Being a farmer at the point in time which the novel takes place, around 1900, was one of the worst and riskiest careers to partake in, so much so that farmers would band together and form political parties in pursuit of maintaining their self-interests. James I. Stewart writes,

American farmers have often expressed dissatisfaction with their lot but the decades after the Civil War were extraordinary in this regard. The period was one of persistent and acute political unrest. The specific concerns of farmers were varied, but at their core was what farmers perceived to be their deteriorating political and economic status (Stewart).

Similarly, Baum also held the interests of common farmers in mind and was supportive of their cause, as noted by Gretchen Ritter in her essay "Silver Slippers and a Golden

Cap: L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Historical Memory in American Politics" where she writes,

Uncle Henry had much in common with the farmers of South Dakota and Kansas in the late nineteenth century, many of whom were drawn to Populism by bad crops and farm foreclosures. Baum was aware of the difficult circumstances faced by farmers in 1890. He defended them as 'friends and brothers, honorable and good men' when he was accused of sympathizing with the Independent (Populist) cause (Ritter 177).

Thus, Baum portrays farmers' lives as so grim not only to provide an uncensored glimpse into the lives of a large majority of working class families in the United States, but to also serve as an education in harsh reality for his child readers. The youthful optimism found in young folks seeking to find honest work in a job worth doing has been gone from this house for what seems like decades. In fact, Uncle Henry and Aunt Em seem as lifeless as the land around them, for as the book describes,

When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now... Uncle Henry never laughed. He worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also, from his long beard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn, and rarely spoke (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 5-6).

However, there was one small change for the family that, while not the complete cure for their position, was enough to make their lives at least marginally better – Dorothy:

“When Dorothy, who was an orphan, first came to her, Aunt Em had been so startled by the child's laughter that she would scream and press her hand upon her heart whenever Dorothy's merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the little girl with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at,” (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 5-6).

This scene, while a tad bit humorous, is also quite dark in its display of how long Aunt Em and Uncle Henry have truly experienced laughter, let alone happiness.

Despite the harshness of Dorothy's background, it all works to serve the purpose of the story. The bleak, soul-crushing life as a poor farmer family in America is later contrasted with the almost utopian nature of Oz. When Dorothy first steps out of her house after being carried away to Oz by the cyclone, her surroundings are described as such,

The cyclone had set the house down very gently--for a cyclone--in the midst of a country of marvelous beauty. There were lovely patches of greensward all about, with stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits. Banks of gorgeous flowers were on every hand, and birds with rare and brilliant plumage sang and fluttered in the trees and bushes. A little way off was a small brook, rushing and sparkling along between green banks, and murmuring in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, gray prairies (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 12).

Through a change in the environment alone, Baum immediately establishes Oz as a paradise, with the land around Dorothy absolutely flourishing. This is one aspect of the book that the film version executes flawlessly: the transition from dusty sepia to vivid color. If her Uncle Henry and Aunt Em were able to travel there (a notion that is fulfilled

later in the series), then they would be able to not simply survive, but thrive financially off of the multitude of crops they could produce, as seen through one passing glance by Dorothy, “There were neat fences at the sides of the road, painted a dainty blue color, and beyond them were fields of grain and vegetables in abundance. Evidently the Munchkins were good farmers and able to raise large crops” (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 28). Oz is not only an environmental and agricultural paradise, but also one that is allowed to experiment with different rules and structures on how to operate. Although elaborated on more thoroughly in later books, Oz becomes known for guaranteeing happiness and security for all of its denizens that accept such benefits, with everyone having the option to work, and many do, but not being required to. And while there are some dangerous beings in Oz (after all no country is perfect), the land nonetheless serves as Dorothy’s escape from the environmental and economical hardship she struggles against in the “real world” of the United States.

Beyond the change in scenery, the characters within Oz serve as allegorical representations of real-world groups of individuals. The novel offers representations of two of the most iconic working class figures in Baum’s time – the farmer and the factory worker – in the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman respectively. The Scarecrow is seen as the most fragile member of the group due to his frequent exclamations of his weakness to fire, a powerful allusion to farmers’ dependence on their crops and how easily they can be ruined by natural disasters. Quentin P. Taylor writes in “Money and Politics in the Land of Oz,”

In the late 1880s and early 1890s... a combination of scorching droughts, severe winters, and an invasion of grasshoppers reduced the prairie to an uninhabitable

wasteland. The result for farmers and all who depended on agriculture for their livelihood was devastating. Many ascribed their misfortune to the natural elements, called it quits, and moved on (Taylor 418).

Just as a fire would result in the death of the Scarecrow, farmers' lives were intrinsically dependent upon their crops and how the elements affected them. Similarly, the Tin Woodman is an almost literal representation of factory workers' fears of becoming part of the machines that they so closely worked with: a replaceable, nonhuman cog in a larger machine. When Dorothy and the Scarecrow meet the Tin Woodman, he describes how his body was slowly hacked away by a cursed axe, "Thereupon the Wicked Witch enchanted my axe, and when I was chopping away at my best one day, for I was anxious to get the new house and my wife as soon as possible, the axe slipped all at once and cut off my left leg" (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 56-57). Here, the Woodman has literally lost his humanity to his tool of work, an actualization of the fears of factory workers.

Both of these interpretations fall in line with the popular "Populist Theory" of the original *Wizard of Oz* books, as purported by Nancy Tystad Koupal in "Add a Pinch of Biography: Seasoning the Populist Allegory Theory with History." The theory generally states,

"Dorothy represents the common man; the Scarecrow is the down-trodden fanner; the Tin Woodman, the dehumanized modern laborer; the Cowardly Lion is orator William Jennings Bryan; the Wizard is any United States president from Grant to McKinley. Dorothy and her Populist friends go off to seek favors from the president only to find he is a humbug and they must solve their own problems" (Koupal 153).

By venturing with Dorothy for a brain, the Scarecrow's quest perhaps represents a desire for simple farmers to achieve higher education and thus to become skilled labor workers that are in far higher demand and less easily expendable. By questing for a heart, the Tin Woodman reflects the desire of factory workers to maintain their humanity in a cold, robotic assembly line of a workforce. Despite agreeing with certain aspects of this theory such as some of the allegorical representations of the characters, I do not believe that this was Baum's only (if at all) intention for writing this novel, nor do I believe that this theory is the singular predominant interpretation for the book. Unfortunately, this particular interpretation has a bit of a reputation of being distorted and taken as Baum's original intention, rather than being merely a hypothetical presented by Henry Littlefield. Koupal describes how,

“As Littlefield's Populist allegory hypothesis gained popularity, it became accepted as fact, and subtle shifts came into play. The idea that Baum was critiquing the Populists got lost as professors stressed the social criticism implied in the allegorical characterizations. This change led to another, which moved Baum himself into the camp of the reformers, without the addition of a single new biographical fact to support the idea” (Koupal 153-154).”

Although the theory presents some solid comparisons to then real-world labor issues Baum was witnessing, I feel that the scope of his political intrigue stretched far beyond merely populism.

Along with the labor force, Baum similarly had several ideas on the concept of technology throughout his *Oz* series. Due to his somewhat mechanical nature and the comparisons that I drew previously, the Tin Woodman can be potentially seen as the

earliest example of Baum providing commentary on the issue of technology, in this case predominantly negative due to the loss of the Tin Woodman's humanity, albeit with the potential for redemption as the Woodman essentially never lost his humanity (the "heart" he was given by the Wizard of Oz was merely a silk sack of sawdust). In fact, all of the objects given to the trio – the Scarecrow's bran and needles for a brain, the Tin Woodman's silk sack for a heart, and the Cowardly Lion's "potion" for courage – could all be seen as a form of technological prosthesis in that they are man-made objects used to make these individuals feel more complete. According to Joshua R. Eyler in "Disability and Prosthesis in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*,"

"Neither the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, nor the Lion has actually changed in any way; their prostheses have simply ameliorated the degree to which they feel the weight of society's disapprobation. These interactions with the Wizard fulfill what has been recently termed the "prosthetic impulse." Employed as they are in a fictional text, these prostheses stand at the intersection of metaphor and material artifact, and they draw on both in order to make meaning" (Eyler 328).

The trio's new prostheses allow them to feel more complete in the eyes of society, even though the benefits of the prosthetics are psychological. Although not a complete one-to-one comparison to real-world technological prosthetics, they both serve the purpose of helping an individual feel more complete in opposition to societal judgment.

One of Baum's most passionate discussions about technology can be seen in the third book in the *Oz* series, *Ozma of Oz*. During the early 1900s, technological growth was occurring rapidly: was it to be accepted in the name of progress, or held with skepticism due to it changing our lives too rapidly with too little understanding of the

potential repercussions? Baum uses *Ozma of Oz*, in a sense, to approach the topic in both ways.

On the one hand, *Ozma of Oz* introduces us to one of the series' most frequently returning characters, Tik-Tok the mechanical man. Unlike the Tin Woodman, Tik-Tok was never human and was instead built from his inception as an early form of robot entirely meant to serve man. Tik-Tok is entirely designed with safety and control in mind, as evident by the highly detailed information and instructions provided on the card included with him (*Ozma of Oz* 51-52). From the beginning, Tik-Tok is displayed as not only loyal, but also incredibly capable in numerous situations: unanimously he is portrayed as a friend. It is thanks to Tik-Tok that Dorothy is able to make it out of just about every dangerous situation in *Ozma of Oz*.

What is most interesting about Tik-Tok is his various windings, he has one for action, one for speech, but the most interesting one is the last: he has a winding for thought. Tik-Tok is unique for a robot in that he is entirely capable of independent thought and, as is seen throughout various books, a capacity for emotion as well. This is in noteworthy contrast to the information card provided with him that reads, "Thinks, Speaks, Acts, and Does Everything but Live" (*Ozma of Oz* 51). Language such as this more directly brings to mind the fears of factory workers who believed that their humanity was being lost. And while Tik-Tok, as a literal machine, would initially appear to fit this bill perfectly, he consistently proves otherwise. Vivian Wagner writes in "Unsettling Oz: Technological Anxieties in the Novels of L. Frank Baum,"

"Tiktok is a curious character as he combines human with mechanical attributes, and he is also sympathetic. He helps Dorothy and Billina at key points in their



adventures; though he ‘does everything but live,’ he is just as alive as many of the other less sympathetic characters. Compared to some organic characters, such as the vegetable Mangaboos encountered later in *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*, he is actually more trustworthy precisely because of his mechanical, and therefore controllable and predictable, body. Like many of Baum’s characters, Tiktok inhabits the borderland between the human and the inhuman, the organic and the inorganic” (Wagner 34).

He is sympathetic towards the plights of his friends and has an innate kindness that moves him to help out those in need for whatever they might need, whether it be saving their lives or performing a simple task. This characterization stands in stark contrast to the previously mentioned “Populist Theory” of the original *Wizard of Oz* book, which emphasized the Tin Woodman, a representation of factory workers, as having lost his humanity as a mechanical man, similar to factory workers who felt that they were losing their humanity to the machines they worked on – as quoted by Michael Gessel in “*The Wizard of Oz as Urban Legend*,” “the Tin Woodman represents dehumanized eastern workers who are reduced to mere machines” (Gessel 147). Tik-Tok, on the other hand, is a mechanical man with the capacity for human emotion, despite what his “programming” would appear to dictate. Tik-Tok could have been portrayed as a non-human object strictly for the service of man, but the fact that Baum gives him a humanistic characterization helps the reader both emphasize with him and see that technology is not entirely dehumanizing. Through Tik-Tok, Baum displays a more positive optimism towards the future of technology and how it could be viewed as a force of help and cooperation.

However, Baum also examines the opposing side of the issue within the same book. One of the most memorable antagonists from the books is the Wheelers, manic creatures with wheels for hands and feet:

It had the form of a man, except that it walked, or rather rolled, upon all fours, and its legs were the same length as its arms, giving them the appearance of the four legs of a beast. Yet it was no beast that Dorothy had discovered, for the person was clothed most gorgeously in embroidered garments of many colors, and wore a straw hat perched jauntily upon the side of its head. But it differed from human beings in this respect, that instead of hands and feet there grew at the end of its arms and legs round wheels, and by means of these wheels it rolled very swiftly over the level ground (*Ozma of Oz* 39-40).

They speed across the countryside like motorcars and harass anyone that passes by. In their first appearance in the novel, they chase Dorothy and Bill across the beachside with dangerous speed. The duo cry out that they cannot run fast enough, alluding to the sheer speed of technological progress and the struggles of those attempting to outrun it in fear. When Dorothy and Bill are trapped on top of a hill, the Wheelers circle the perimeter below like a pack of vultures waiting to pick the flesh of the weak. It is the Wheelers that represent the chaos that can be brought by technology if it is not kept in check, with human-like figures being dehumanized by technology. However, the Wheelers provide even more interesting commentary during their fight scene with Tik-Tok,

“As for that,” answered Tiktok, “I am only a ma-chine, and can-not feel sor-row or joy, no mat-ter what hap-pens. But you are wrong to think your-self ter-ri-ble or fierce.”

"Why so?" asked the Wheeler.

"Be-cause no one else thinks as you do. Your wheels make you help-less to in-jure an-y one. For you have no fists and can not scratch or e-ven pull hair. Nor have you an-y feet to kick with. All you can do is to yell and shout, and that does not hurt an-y one at all."

The Wheeler burst into a flood of tears, to Dorothy's great surprise.

"Now I and my people are ruined forever!" he sobbed; "for you have discovered our secret. Being so helpless, our only hope is to make people afraid of us, by pretending we are very fierce and terrible" (*Ozma of Oz* 78-9).

The Wheelers' secret has been revealed, they only give off the appearance that they are frightening in order to scare others. The interesting commentary that I think lies here is the idea that the Wheelers' wheels in fact make them weaker rather than stronger: the notion that technology has made them more feeble and unable to take care of themselves without it. This is Baum continuing to make prophetic judgments over the progression of technology, the idea that we may become overly dependent on technology to a degree that we are weaker without it. Contrast this with Tik-Tok, who shows the positive benefits of technology as strong, but also under careful control.

Baum clearly had a sympathetic spot for the blight of the working class members of society during the time he was writing these books. This is most evidently seen through the family of the series most frequent protagonist, Dorothy Gale. The Gale family, consisting of Aunt Em, Uncle Henry, Dorothy, and Toto, are nothing more than simple farmers trying to toil away at a simple living on a small farm in Kansas. Baum's sympathy is shown through the conditions that the Gale family works in: they are toiling

away with modest work at a harsh environment that doesn't give them nearly enough to prosper, only to survive by scraping by. This is one factor as to why the Land of Oz seems all the more magical to Dorothy, no one in the country has to toil away at harsh labor because the country is lush and bountiful in whatever its peoples may need.

However, back in the real world Aunt Em and Uncle Henry are still tormented by the harsh climate, with the opening of *The Emerald City of Oz* being very similar in setup to the first novel: "Dorothy Gale lived on a farm in Kansas, with her Aunt Em and her Uncle Henry. It was not a big farm, nor a very good one, because sometimes the rain did not come when the crops needed it, and then everything withered and dried up" (*The Emerald City of Oz* 18). The Gale family's suffering is only bolstered by the even more malicious economy. In fact, the novel begins with Uncle Henry revealing that due to the devastation the tornado caused to the farm, he had to take out a mortgage from creditors that has left him in massive debt: "Once a cyclone had carried away Uncle Henry's house, so that he was obliged to build another; and as he was a poor man he had to mortgage his farm to get the money to pay for the new house" (*The Emerald City of Oz* 18). The final nail in the coffin is the physical state of Uncle Henry himself, the primary breadwinner for the family who continues to work despite his poor health: "Then his health became bad and he was too feeble to work. The doctor ordered him to take a sea voyage and he went to Australia and took Dorothy with him. That cost a lot of money, too" (*The Emerald City of Oz* 18). By the time *The Emerald City of Oz* comes around, Uncle Henry has been caught within a vicious cycle of poverty for years on end, and now he can no longer simply survive within his poor situation: if he's forced to remain where he is much longer he is going to die. As described in the book:

“Uncle Henry grew poorer every year, and the crops raised on the farm only bought food for the family. Therefore the mortgage could not be paid. At last the banker who had loaned him the money said that if he did not pay on a certain day, his farm would be taken away from him. This worried Uncle Henry a good deal, for without the farm he would have no way to earn a living. He was a good man, and worked in the field as hard as he could; and Aunt Em did all the housework, with Dorothy's help” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 19).

With all of these descriptors contained within the first few pages of *The Emerald City of Oz*, Baum is attempting to not only create sympathy for the Gale family by barraging the reader with such immense pain, but also provide a non-flinching look at the genuine hardships that farmers were required to work under at the time.

Each time Dorothy returned from Oz and told her family of the adventures she partook in, they obviously would not believe her despite how idyllic the land sounded. In truth, it is quite tragic how disparate Dorothy’s awareness of the two worlds she travels between is. For due to how much time she regularly spends in Oz, she apparently “had not known before how desperately poor they were” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 22). This is some excellent insight on Baum’s part, showing both how children are often kept in the dark from financial troubles for the sake of maintaining a sense of control and how Dorothy is so unaware of how her real world operates that she does not even have an entire grasp on the problems that exist there. Even though Uncle Henry has been forced to remain in the real world and suffer through such hardship, he was nonetheless tempted by the society of Oz due to just how much better it sounded:

When Dorothy told about the riches of this fairy country Uncle Henry would sigh, for he knew that a single one of the great emeralds that were so common there would pay all his debts and leave his farm free. But Dorothy never brought any jewels home with her, so their poverty became greater every year (*The Emerald City of Oz* 21).

Only by believing Dorothy's fantastical stories of Oz and going there themselves are both Uncle Henry and Aunt Em able to escape their overwhelming debt back in the real world. In the Land of Oz, this hardworking couple that has constantly been on the lowest rung of society without any payoff are finally rewarded for their perseverance and their kindness, being brought into Ozma's castle as the honored family of Princess Dorothy. It is here that they are treated as royalty, allowed to live in the royal quarters, dress in extravagant attire, and be treated as members of the royalty of Oz itself, with crowds of citizens adoring them and their kind nature. It is this depiction of Oz as a sort of socialist utopia that serves as the answer to the capitalist woes of Uncle Henry and Aunt Em.

## CHAPTER II: POLITICS

For a collection of children's books, Baum's *Oz* series is surprisingly political. Although the first book in the series, *The Wizard of Oz*, is most commonly described as a "Populist Fable" as suggested by Henry Littlefield, with the main characters, locations, and events serving as allegories showing support for the same political movement of Baum's time, the series as a whole actually goes much deeper than merely this singular political lens. Rather, the *Oz* series, in a way, serves as a political whiteboard for Baum: an experimental ground where he can brainstorm numerous different means of establishing a political society, its governance, and how it operates in order to theorize what might have worked best. Baum's views seem to fluctuate in some shape or form throughout the entirety of his original fourteen *Oz* books, never settling on one specific political stance and instead opting to analyze the spectrum. The notion of Baum experimenting with numerous political ideologies is supported by Fred Erisman in "L. Frank Baum and the American Political Tradition,"

Like other authors throughout history, L. Frank Baum was aware of, and responsive to, the political events and ideas that surrounded him. It is, therefore, no surprise that these elements appear in his work... The significance of these references, however, is less that they establish Baum as Populist or Progressive, Democrat or Republican, than that they suggest the extent to which he recognized and continued in the tradition of a notably American strain of political idealism.

That Baum tended to side with the Republican party is clear. His *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* editorials written in 1890 and 1891, overtly and consistently support Republican candidates both locally and nationally. Almost twenty years later, in *Aunt Jane's Nieces at Work*, he paints the Democratic standard-bearers as unscrupulous and suspect. Yet, his newspaper writings also speak well of Dakota Territory's Independent party, which included the Populists, praising their idealism and resistance to the spoils system. Such evidence suggests that he was able to look beyond the limitations of party affiliations and consider the larger goals the political process can achieve (Erisman 162).

No matter what, the one consistent view that Baum appeared to maintain was that the current system of politics of the United States of America was not working. Each time Baum offers forth a new manner of ruler, economy, or overall system of governing, it is as if he is delivering it as a suggestion – a recommendation for anyone reading his work to test out this new style to see if it would work or not. In Baum's eyes no matter what the final result was, it would be better than how America operated in Baum's time, despite the fact that Oz itself is riddled with witches, gnomes, and other monstrous creatures. This view is also in line with the narrative structure of the first few *Oz* books. Each of these books all had the same end goal of arriving at Oz, whether that be the Emerald City or the country as a whole, in order for personal character desires to be fulfilled or to just seek safety from the cruel outside world. This evidently establishes Oz as a utopia in Baum's eyes, despite its flaws in internal logic that occasionally crop up throughout the series.



Tison Pugh's essay "'Are We Cannibals, Let Me Ask? Or Are We Faithful Friends?': Food, Interspecies Cannibalism, and the Limits of Utopia in L. Frank Baum's Oz Books," for example, discusses how the very fact that since everyone can talk in the Land of Oz, including animals, any eating of one animal by another should be considered the cannibalism of one intelligent life form to another. Pugh writes,

Despite the utopian nature of L. Frank Baum's Land of Oz, a recurrent theme of cannibalism undermines its status as a halcyon land of benevolent fairies, kindly talking animals, and marvelously odd creatures. The need to eat and the ensuing search for food—daily activities that undergird biological existence—are never overlooked in Oz, and this bodily realism deflates the magical fantasy of these modern-day fairy tales (Pugh 324).

Not only does this undermine the series as the portrayal of a "utopian society," but it also contradicts the series internal logic of how "No one can die in the Land of Oz." Although the logic is not perfect, the fact that Baum places the series within a fantasy setting allows both Baum to freely experiment with interesting ideas and the audience to suspend their disbelief in order to listen to them.

By attempting to introduce the concept of multiple, more radical political ideologies to children instead of simply just whichever one they lived under, Baum could be considered rather revolutionary for his actions. Baum always describes at the beginnings of his books that he writes them for the children and no one else. And yet he is constantly introducing very adult concepts to them on a consistently literal level, rather than occasionally metaphorical like other children's authors.

Throughout the *Oz* series of novels, the most dominating political ideology communicated to readers is not populism, but rather a form of socialism. Although this description is in truth a bit more simplistic than Baum's actually political preferences, given the vast variety of social ideas he discusses throughout his series that struggle to fit neatly into any of our predefined political ideologies, it bears the closest real world resemblance to the system that Baum seems to favor, albeit with a few specific caveats. To put it simply, the Land of Oz can essentially be described as a socialist utopia. One passage from *The Emerald City of Oz* provides the first true description of how society functions in Oz:

There were no poor people in the Land of Oz, because there was no such thing as money, and all property of every sort belonged to the Ruler. The people were her children, and she cared for them. Each person was given freely by his neighbors whatever he required for his use, which is as much as any one may reasonably desire. Some tilled the lands and raised great crops of grain, which was divided equally among the entire population, so that all had enough. There were many tailors and dressmakers and shoemakers and the like, who made things that any who desired them might wear. Likewise there were jewelers who made ornaments for the person, which pleased and beautified the people, and these ornaments also were free to those who asked for them. Each man and woman, no matter what he or she produced for the good of the community, was supplied by the neighbors with food and clothing and a house and furniture and ornaments and games. If by chance the supply ever ran short, more was taken from the great storehouses of

the Ruler, which were afterward filled up again when there was more of any article than the people needed.

Every one worked half the time and played half the time, and the people enjoyed the work as much as they did the play, because it is good to be occupied and to have something to do. There were no cruel overseers set to watch them, and no one to rebuke them or to find fault with them. So each one was proud to do all he could for his friends and neighbors, and was glad when they would accept the things he produced.

You will know by what I have here told you, that the Land of Oz was a remarkable country. I do not suppose such an arrangement would be practical with us, but Dorothy assures me that it works finely with the Oz people” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 31-33).

Although the description seen above could be best described as socialistic in nature, it features a multitude of its own unique twists set forth by Baum that not only solidify the more fantastical nature of the politics he is allowed to play with in these books, but it also helps to define Baum’s own unique system of politics that does not entirely resemble any one system that exists in our world. Instead, throughout the *Oz* series Baum establishes a new form of progressive political system founded on the ideas of equality, freedom, and individuality.

In Oz, there can never be any true form of capitalism because there is no currency. In fact, the lack of currency immediately makes it difficult to classify Oz to any form of existing political system, even socialism (although a society without currency does resemble some socialist theorists idea of a more advanced socialist society). With no

form of currency in existence, the citizens of Oz instead work with one another to assist the common good, their contributions to society are not from the money they make but rather by offering up whatever skill they have to share with everyone else: farmers raise crops, bakers cook food, and there is always plenty for everyone. In the Land of Oz, all citizens are considered equal. While this notion seems incredibly simplistic, and indeed utopian as previously described, this is one of the benefits of Baum establishing Oz as a fantasy world – it provides him with more leeway to explore such ideas. By showing the best possible scenario for how a political system could (not necessarily will) work, he is able to convince some readers to try out something different from then current American politics.

One of the more interesting aspects of Oz that more strongly defines it from an American democracy is the fact that a queen rules it: Ozma of Oz. As stated in the description, while everything in Oz is shared amongst its inhabitants, “all property of every sort belonged to the Ruler” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 31). This is one of the most important differences between not only the American society that Baum lived in, but also what we would define as a socialistic society and the politics of the Land of Oz. While in socialism, all authority ultimately stems from the workers, in Oz Baum makes a consistent point that Ozma is the Ruler of all. This, however, creates a problem. In a society where everyone is considered equal, the very notion of even having one designated figurehead that rules over a population whether it be a mayor, president, or in this case a queen immediately establishes a difference in power: everyone is not truly equal. This creates a complicated power dynamic between Ozma and her citizens, bringing into question if everyone truly is as “equal” as implied. Baum attempts to

mitigate this through one important factor: Ozma is a benevolent ruler. Ozma as a character is defined by her humble beginnings as a poor boy (more to be explained in the chapter on gender) and her unfaltering kindness towards her citizens whom she only has the best intentions for. This is incredibly important in Baum's eyes, for the fact that she is considered a "good" Ruler is why he argues that the citizens of Oz are, or rather should be content with her "allowing" them to "share" amongst her vast riches. Once again, Baum benefits from the fairytale setting of his books, allowing him to emphasize the utopian nature of Oz.

However, just because Baum frequently touts the benefits of a society founded upon the importance of the collective does not mean that he is oblivious to its potential downsides, especially if taken to too far of an extreme. This darker side of collectivism is seen in earlier books such as *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*. At one point in this journey, Dorothy and her companions arrive in Boboland, the Land of the Mangaboos. The Mangaboos are fascinating in that rather than being made of meat like humans, they are all entirely vegetable in nature. From the very outset, Baum establishes the Mangaboos as an "other," a society that we can more easily further ourselves from. This is in contrast to the citizens of Oz, who are predominantly more humanoid in nature, such as the Munchkins. Although the Land of the Mangaboos only gets darker as Dorothy's group delves further into its society, I believe that this notion of "the other" is important as Baum immediately wants the reader to see this civilization as one where something is slightly wrong from the very beginning. With Boboland, Baum wishes to show a society that, while initially appearing similar to Oz, is one that differs from Baum's favored ideals and is to be considered evil because of that.

Because the Mangaboos are vegetable people, they are not born in the same manner as humans. Instead of having new people birthed through sexual reproduction, the Mangaboos are grown in a manner similar to plants. As explained in the novel:

Inside the hedge they came upon row after row of large and handsome plants with broad leaves gracefully curving until their points nearly reached the ground. In the center of each plant grew a daintily dressed Mangaboo, for the clothing of all these creatures grew upon them and was attached to their bodies.

The growing Mangaboos were of all sizes, from the blossom that had just turned into a wee baby to the full-grown and almost ripe man or woman. On some of the bushes might be seen a bud, a blossom, a baby, a half-grown person and a ripe one; but even those ready to pluck were motionless and silent, as if devoid of life.

This sight explained to Dorothy why she had seen no children among the Mangaboos, a thing she had until now been unable to account for (*Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* 67-68).

On the surface, Boboland would appear to exercise a form of society collectivism similar to that seen in the Land of Oz, where all of the citizens are literally “born equal.” The reason that Baum seems to distinguish this form of equalized population with that seen in Oz comes down to an important ideology: personal freedom. In Oz, all of the citizens are equal to each other and are free to pursue their own individual interests that will in some shape or form contribute to the greater good of the rest of the society, it does not matter what a person wants to do so long as they are willing to share. By giving its citizens such an extent of personal freedom, Oz as a government shows that it is committed to taking care of its citizens no matter what they choose to do. This starkly contrasts with

Boboland, where the country's population is literally grown in gardens with their destinies already predetermined. Unlike in Oz, purpose is already predisposed to every citizen because they are all grown with reason: everyone in society is easily replaceable because new members of society are grown ready to enter society. Boboland is cold and calculated in its control over the population. This is accentuated by the fact that there are no children in this society, for all Mangaboos are created as full-grown adults. This is most likely due to the fact that children could not contribute to the greater good as well as adults can. Once Dorothy and her friends have discovered the true nature of Boboland, it appears to be a dystopian fever dream, with the society of the Mangaboos being almost eugenic in its treatment of its people. As Baum describes,

There were men and women, but no children at all, and the folks were all beautifully formed and attractively dressed and had wonderfully handsome faces. There was not an ugly person in all the throng, yet Dorothy was not especially pleased by the appearance of these people because their features had no more expression than the faces of dolls. They did not smile nor did they frown, or show either fear or surprise or curiosity or friendliness. They simply stared at the strangers (*Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* 38).

With the goal of eugenics being to perfectly control the people of a society, it would appear that Boboland has done exactly that. Dorothy compares the people to lifeless dolls – perfectly crafted in appearance, but hollow on the inside and unable to show any emotion. The Mangaboos lack life and humanity, as shown during an encounter between the Vegetable Kingdom's Sorcerer Gwig and the Wizard of Oz:

“He will not be a wonderful Wizard long,” remarked Gwig.

"Why not?" enquired the Wizard.

"Because I am going to stop your breath," was the reply. "I perceive that you are curiously constructed, and that if you cannot breathe you cannot keep alive"

*(Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz 59).*

Gwig notices that the Wizard needs to breathe in order to survive, which he defines as the Wizard being "curiously constructed" in contrast to himself, a Mangaboo, which apparently have no need to breath. Breathing is what literally gives us life as humans, and by not needing this function Baum further emphasizes the lifelessness of the Mangaboos. This lifelessness is crucial, as Baum is showing here that these people are so devoid of freedom, they have literally had the life taken away from them.

As an important side note, Baum pushes the danger of this type of society even further with his description of the architecture of Boboland. When Dorothy and her friends first arrive, she notices that, "The houses of the city were all made of glass, so clear and transparent that one could look through the walls as easily as through a window" *(Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz 30)*. Although this may seem like a minor detail, I personally did not even pay much mind to it upon my first reading, Baum is making quite a profound statement about this society: there is no privacy. By having all of the buildings in the city composed of glass, the citizens who live within the city are constantly visible to everyone else. Similarly to the composition of glass, this society is one that appears to be beautiful and stable on the surface, when in actuality it is one that is always on the verge of being easily broken due to its structure. Here, Baum is further criticizing a collectivist society, but one that disregards the personal freedom of its citizens. This notion of personal freedom is paramount to Baum's ideal society.



I believe that this notion of “personal freedom” is crucial when examining Baum’s potential political preferences. He has a very particular viewpoint that seems to favor both an entirely (or at least almost entirely) equal population that also celebrates the individual aspects and freedoms of each person in it. I do not think that these ideas have to lie in opposition with each other, as both are very admirable goals to strive for in a society. As noted by Andrew Karp,

In the Oz works, Baum continually grapples with two political issues debated in the United States since its inception: 1) the conflict over whether to give primacy to “individual fights and freedom” or highest priority to “community life and the good of collectivities”... and 2) the problem of how to create a unified community that still recognizes the “fundamentally multiracial and multi-ethnic nature of the United States” (Karp 102).

After all, the world that Baum is creating is one of fantasy, so anything is possible. This fantasy is just one that appears to encourage its young readers to create real-world changes so that it does not have to stay within the world of the imaginary, but rather can become a reality.

Although Baum seems to hold deep value in the right to individual expression and freedom, he frequently defies this logic throughout the *Oz* series by featuring characters, both hero and villain, that are persecuted for their personal opinions.

A prime example of this can be found in *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* through the character of Unc Nunkie. Similar to other *Oz* books, *Patchwork Girl* begins with a scene showing a family in poverty, in this case Unc Nunkie and his nephew Ojo. However, what is noticeably odd about this scene is that it is the first one to show poverty within

the Land of Oz. From the outset, this contradicts the utopian society with no use of currency established in previous books. Thankfully, a conversation between the two reveals the reason behind their situation:

“Of course,” said Ojo, who was obliged to talk because his uncle would not, “no one starves in the Land of Oz, either. There is plenty for everyone, you know; only, if it isn't just where you happen to be, you must go where it is.” The aged Munchkin wriggled again and stared at his small nephew as if disturbed by his argument. “By to-morrow morning,” the boy went on, “we must go where there is something to eat, or we shall grow very hungry and become very unhappy” (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 10-11).

While previous books established that all citizens of Oz share their resources in order to ensure mutual survival and happiness, this book reveals an interesting work around for how someone could still live a life of poverty in an otherwise utopian society. For the Land of Oz operates in several “no’s” – no death, no starving, etc. – however, this is apparently only if one is willing to abide by the rules set forth. Although Unc Nunkie is not given much character development throughout the novel, especially due to him being a man of so few words, the small amount of description he is given does allow the reader to infer certain qualities about his character. The fact that Unc Nunkie attempts to grow his own food that he refuses to share with others, consisting of a single bread tree (a tree that grows loaves of bread), shows that he wishes to live a life of independence. He is so stalwart in living this life of solitude that even though his tree only has two unripe loaves on it left, he still refuses to partake in the supply of food shared amongst the rest of the

Munchkins. Unlike the majority of the population, Nunkie is classified as more of a rugged individualist rather than a collectivist.

While Unc Nunkie displays a unique level of independence, it is one that Baum apparently does not wish to exist within the Land of Oz if the level of antagonism shown towards Nunkie is any indication. As previously mentioned, because of Unc Nunkie's refusal to partake in the communal wealth and welfare, both he and his nephew are forced to live in poverty. In fact, the driving conflict of the book is that Nunkie is magically cursed and becomes a marble statue through no fault of his own. Whenever I read this book now, I always view it as Baum unleashing some form of divine punishment on Nunkie for his refusal to submit to the status quo. This whole ordeal feels without purpose, at least in terms of character development for Nunkie. Baum could have used this book as a means for both sides, author and character, to articulate why they wish to live in the ways that they do, and Nunkie could have potentially gone through a life-altering journey that opened his eyes to the value of sharing one's life and resources with friends who do the same. But instead, we do not see Unc Nunkie again until the very end of the book; he is frozen in place as a statue and is saved not by the efforts of Ojo (who has been questing for a cure the entire book only to be revealed that he cannot actually cure Unc Nunkie) but rather a deus-ex machina in the form of the Wizard of Oz. The Wizard makes a "magic pass," Nunkie comes back to life, and all he has to say is "Thanks." But that's not all, Ojo and by effect Nunkie are rewarded by Ozma with, "'a nice house just outside the walls of the Emerald City,' she said, 'and there you shall make your future home and be under my protection'" (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 422). By the end of the book, Unc Nunkie has learned nothing.

I find the use of “freedom” to be an incredibly interesting distinction, as it shows Baum holding a noticeable vendetta against those resistant to change, or at least resistant to the new methods of politics he is experimenting with. This is far more apparent in later books in the *Oz* series, where more of the antagonists are evil rulers of smaller countries within Oz that attempt to institute different means of rule. In these books, Baum makes an interesting comparison between unacceptable notions of individualism and improper rulers.

The beginning of *Tik-Tok of Oz* reveals yet another new country within the Land of Oz: Oogaboo. Queen Ann of Oogaboo is upset at the beginning of the novel because her kingdom is “the smallest and poorest in all the Land of Oz” and she desires for more (*Tik-Tok of Oz* 7). As with the previous novel, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, Baum has an explanation for why some can be poor in a land where there is no money and everything is shared:

They knew that all of Oz, including their own territory, was ruled by a beautiful Princess named Ozma, who lived in the splendid Emerald City; yet the simple folk of Oogaboo never visited Ozma. They had a royal family of their own—not especially to rule over them, but just as a matter of pride (*Tik-Tok of Oz* 8).

Similar to Unc Nunkie, the only thing keeping some inhabitants from living with more is that they are simply too “proud” to accept the help. The royal family does not even rule over them in benevolence, as Queen Ann’s conquest throughout the entire book is to merely claim the riches from other countries in Oz, a goal she obviously does not achieve by the end of the novel. Instead, she is merely sent back to Oogaboo without much pomp or circumstance. Again, it is interesting that Baum is providing a more blatant criticism of

wanting to take care of one's self in these later novels, even if one is worse off in doing so.

*The Scarecrow of Oz* continues this trend of disadvantaged or otherwise faulty kingdoms within the Land of Oz. While the book prior had the country of Oogaboo, this book primarily takes place in Jinxland. Jinxland is ruled by King Krewl, a prime minister who overthrew his King Phearse, who in turn was the prime minister to the king that he overthrew, King Kynd. Similar to Oogaboo, Jinxland is a kingdom that seems relatively forgotten by the rest of Oz,

“Every bit of land that is surrounded by the great desert is the Land of Oz, as you ought to know as well as I do; but I'm sorry to say that Jinxland is separated from the rest of the Quadling Country by that row of high mountains you see yonder, which have such steep sides that no one can cross them. So we live here all by ourselves, and are ruled by our own King, instead of by Ozma of Oz” (*The Scarecrow of Oz* 143).

I think that this aspect of neglect, the self-rule that the kingdom felt forced to impose. This is of course coupled with the kingdom's evil ruler, King Krewl, who clearly takes after his name. However, this kingdom is more unique, even more so than the similar kingdom of Oogaboo from the last book. While in that one Queen Ann was simply won over by Oz and did not end up attempting to overthrow it, King Krewl and Jinxland are portrayed as the antagonistic forces of the entire novel. It makes it seem like Baum is attempting to deconstruct his own idyllic fantasy world, where even a benevolent rule in the center (Ozma and the Emerald City) can result in the neglect of its subsections.

As previously mentioned, Baum's depiction of a "utopian" society is not exactly a consistent one due to the benefits of taking place in a fantasy setting. However, these inconsistencies are sometimes a bit more noticeable when it comes to their politics. One fascinating article I found during my research was "Utopian tension in L. Frank Baum's *Oz*" by Andrew Karp. This article was highly beneficial in providing a detailed and researched analysis of Baum's utopian ideals and how it might not work out as well as Baum thought. According to Karp, the primary conflict comes from Baum's desire to have Oz acknowledge three ideas that continually clash at the same time: rugged individual rights & freedom, community life & the good of the collective, and the acknowledgment and acceptance of the various types of people that live in a community in terms of gender, race, etc. (Karp 103). Karp acknowledges Baum's appreciation for both a centralized government (the Emerald City) with the advancement of technology and the rights of individuals to live rustic lives (the individual countries of Oz). Karp argues that perhaps this was intentional as a representation of the state of America at the time: caught between the romanticized past and the industrial present (Karp 103-105). Baum praises individualism through his unique characters, but also desires for everyone to get along by accepting their differences and working together to make everyone happy. In the end, Baum's solution appears to follow this idea: be your own person, but play nice with others. Things, of course, are not this simple in the real world.

### CHAPTER III: GENDER

Out of all the interesting ideas experimented with throughout the *Oz* series of books, one of the most experimental and perhaps even revolutionary was Baum's unique perception of gender and identity for the time, particularly for a series of children's novels. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as a pro-gay fable is one of the most well known readings of this series, alongside the "Populist Fable" analysis. The first book's 1939 film adaptation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *The Wizard of Oz*, is one of the most influential films of the LGBTQ+ community due to the homosocial relationship between the three male leads and the universal kindness and understanding displayed in its unique female protagonist. According to Tison Pugh,

The film version of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* serves as a pop-culture icon of twentieth-century Western gay culture. With Judy Garland as the star, its exaggerated characters of good and evil, and its Technicolor wonderland of vibrant colors and outlandish costumes, the film displays a queer sensibility that countless viewers adore. Today gay bars in New Orleans, Seattle, and Sweden bear the name Oz, and the iconic polychromatic flag of the gay community pays homage to the film's theme song, "Over the Rainbow" (Pugh 217).

However, while the film is often considered more influential in its impact on the gay community, the books themselves featured far more overt progressivism in the field of gender politics.

One of the more unique aspects of the *Oz* series is that they are typically helmed by young female protagonists, most notably Dorothy Gale who is the most frequently reoccurring lead. Being able to see themselves through a brave and adventurous character in a work of fiction would have been inspiring for young girls in Baum's time, as noted by Stuart Culver in his essay "Growing Up in Oz,"

In a brief prefatory note to *The Land of Oz*, Baum identifies his reader as "another Dorothy." As an American girl seven years old in 1904, Baum's hypothetical reader will grow up to become a member of the nation's first generation of women voters. Yet her generation, situated between those of the suffragist and the flapper, will be one torn between conventional notions of propriety and new possibilities of pleasure and action. Baum's fairy tale offers its reader a compromise, a way of growing into a proper young woman while yet regarding her gender as something other than an inescapable biological limit (Culver 608).

Although I would imagine that it would be unusual during the time period for a young female to be the protagonist of a novel marketed beyond simply young female readers, I find it even more interesting that while the Wizard of Oz does rule the capital city, the rest of the four corners of the nation are domineered by women (not to mention the fact that the throne is later assumed by its rightful heir: also a woman). Along with the fact that the primary antagonist, the Wicked Witch of the West, is a hideous woman that enslaves an entire population of people, Baum establishes an interesting contrast that both



raises up women's roles in the world he has created and in some instances makes them more frightening, with both serving as a critique of men's fear of women's progress. "As an erotically antisocial queer utopia, Oz challenges the libidinal economy of hetero-normative reproduction and highlights queer alternatives to expected forms of social organization," Pugh describes in his essay (Pugh 218). This shows a more direct correlation between the "queer" forms of ruling a society Baum exemplifies throughout the series and the "queer" social structure that elevates non-heterosexual male individuals into positions of power or notoriety – the two can operate in tandem. However, Baum's fascinating analysis of gender extends far beyond merely the first book.

While the first *Oz* book featured some interesting ideas and suggestions in terms of gender politics, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* features a more complex discussion of gender identity. Perhaps the most important topic of discussion comes from the main protagonist of the novel: Tip. Tip, full name Tippetarius, begins the story as a young orphaned boy under the fearful ownership of the old witch Mombi, a witch without control over one of the 4 countries of Oz but still an example of frightening feminine dominance similar to the Wicked Witches of the West and East of the previous book. Throughout most of the novel, Tip progresses through the story with relative normalcy as a caring and inventive child. However, perhaps the most shocking development of the novel comes towards the end when the heroes are interrogating Mombi over the whereabouts of the missing Princess Ozma, the rightful heir to the throne of Oz. Mombi reveals that Ozma was brought to her as a baby by the Wizard of Oz himself in order for him to obtain his seat of power at the death of the previous king in an act of male suppression of proper feminine power. The most shocking revelation comes when Mombi

reveals she “transformed her into... a boy” (*The Marvelous Land of Oz* 297). Baum executes this twist with exceptional capability, as there is no indication throughout the entire novel than Tip was the missing Ozma, and this moment of completely pulling out the rug from the reader’s feet was precisely Baum’s means of subtly introducing the notion of gender politics to his audience. Tip’s personality doesn’t change once he learns that he is actually female, if anything even he is quite resistant to the idea at first, but the most important part about Tip’s character arc is that he doesn’t undergo a personality change once he transitions into Ozma. All he asks from his friends, and all Baum asks from his readers, is understanding, as seen when Ozma says,

“I hope none of you will care less for me than you did before. I’m just the same Tip, you know; only—only—“

“Only you’re different!” said the Pumpkinhead; and everyone thought it was the wisest speech he had ever made (*The Marvelous Land of Oz* 303).

This notion of gender being merely a societal construct, as noted by Stuart Culver, was a truly radical idea for Baum to introduce to children. However, I believe he was not fearful of doing so due to children’s capacity to more easily accept such concepts over adults.

Other than Tip / Ozma, the most important character in the book in terms of gender discussion is none other than its antagonist: General Jinjur. Though Mombi was the personal oppressive force over Tip for his entire life, General Jinjur represents the first major threat against the City of Oz ever since the ascension of the Scarecrow as its new ruler. Jinjur is the general of an entirely female army, and her brash, militaristic character could potentially serve as a parody of male fears of encroaching feminism of

the time. Jinjur's goal to overthrow Oz strictly because its leader is male and the fact that an army of attractive women overtakes Oz without any opposition because none of the men want to hurt them was both highly humorous and poignantly political. This once again highlights the idea of Oz being an experimental landscape for a variety of political ruling styles, an idea discussed in detail in Tison Pugh's essay "There lived in the Land of Oz two queerly made men": Queer Utopianism and Antisocial Eroticism in L. Frank Baum's Oz Series." Pugh states, "As an erotically antisocial queer utopia, Oz challenges the libidinal economy of hetero- normative reproduction and highlights queer alternatives to expected forms of social organization" (Pugh 218). This idea of "queer" forms of ruling government even further correlates with Baum's opposition of government at the time and his desire to explore other forms.

Unfortunately, Jinjur's character arc takes a significant negative turn when it is later revealed in *The Tin Woodman of Oz* that she has both made friends with and married the Scarecrow. Instead of a powerful general of an army of women, Jinjur is now the happy and contented wife of a farmer. I believe this is a very fascinating for Baum to include as it seems to completely backtrack Jinjur as a character and make her more "palatable" and "submissive" by sticking her with a man. Perhaps this is meant to be a criticism of radical feminism rather than constructive feminism, with the "villainous" feminist receiving "justice" by becoming a gentle wife.

*Ozma of Oz* continues ideas of gender politics introduced in in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. Of important note is Dorothy's initial companion to the Land of Ev, Bill the Hen. When discussing the bizarre nature of being a female chicken with a male name, Bill explains:

“Of course. But when I was first hatched out no one could tell whether I was going to be a hen or a rooster; so the little boy at the farm where I was born called me Bill... When I grew up, and he found that I didn't crow and fight, as all the roosters do, he did not think to change my name, and every creature in the barnyard, as well as the people in the house, knew me as 'Bill.' So Bill I've always been called, and Bill is my name.”

“But it's all wrong, you know,” declared Dorothy, earnestly; “and, if you don't mind, I shall call you 'Billina.’” Putting the “eena” on the end makes it a girl's name, you see.”

“Oh, I don't mind it in the least,” returned the yellow hen. “It doesn't matter at all what you call me, so long as I know the name means ME” (*Ozma of Oz* 24-25).

Although far much more subtle than the gender transition of Tip to Ozma in the previous book, Bill / Billina's character is noteworthy for continuing Oz's notion of gender politics as being primarily irrelevant, with the established norm being acceptance over questioning or criticism. Dorothy claims that Bill should add an “eena” to the end of her name in order to sound more feminine, while Bill claims that such semantics are unimportant, but in the end she does not mind as long as she is not treated any differently. This is similar to Tip not wanting to be treated any differently upon transforming into Ozma, continuing Baum's notion that gender should not define a person's behavior, a notion that is continually being drip-fed into the minds of his child readers.

Baum's ambivalence to such strictly defined notions of gender identity are noteworthy, as Martin Gardner noted in his paper “John Dough and the Cherub.” The

Baum book of the same name and the titular cherub, named “Chick,” is notably agender, not being defined with either male or female signifiers. According to Gardner,

Asked by his publisher if Chick is a boy or a girl, Baum reacts with amazement, “Doesn’t it tell it in the story?” Informed that it does not, Baum replies: “I cannot remember that Chick the Cherub impressed me as other than a joyous, sweet, venturesome and loveable child. Who cares whether it is a boy or a girl?”

Unsatisfied, the publisher questions his office staff only to get contradictory opinions. A second appeal is made to Baum. All he will say is, “Leave it to the children” (Gardner 112).

When Baum simply replies “Leave it to the children,” he reaffirms his belief that children should be free to make their own decisions about their identities and the choices they make in life. To children, societal confines such as gender are irrelevant, and Baum appears to support this worldview for the benefit of every individual the right to express themselves for who they want to be.

In *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, the creation of Scraps, the titular Patchwork Girl, was a fascinating process that in a way echoed Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The wife of a Crooked Magician, Margolette, uses the life powder from *The Marvelous Land of Oz* to bring a quilt dummy to life to work as a servant for her. However, the doll’s originally submissive personality is mixed in with cleverness and wildness when Ojo mixes other qualities into her makeshift brain before she is brought to life. I thought this was noticeably similar to the reproduction of the Mangaboos from *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*, where people were able to create others with perfect specifications for the good of society. Ojo’s tampering with the Patchwork Girl’s creation seems to be a challenge to

that idea, as it is because of him that she becomes the wild and rebellious character that she is, being both interesting and resourceful in a pinch for the protagonists. However, it could also serve as a representation of a male's mental construction of a "perfect woman" turned real, which would hint at a darker, more controlling undertone.

*The Tin Woodman of Oz* features a fascinating scene at the end of the novel when the Tin Woodman and his group finally reach the home of Amie, his former lover from when he was human. They knock on her door only to find that she is married to Chopfyt – former assistant of Ku-Klip the witch. Chopfyt is made from the old human parts of both the Tin Woodman (Nick Chopper) and his new friend who also pines for Amie, the Tin Soldier (Fyter). Despite the Woodman and Soldier's long quest to see her and compete for her affection, Amie doesn't have to choose one or the other: she has already been happily living her life with both of them. When both ask her to join them, with the Woodman reminding her that she'd be an Empress with him, she says that she does not wish to change her life and, "All I ask is to be left alone and not to be annoyed by visitors" (*The Tin Woodman of Oz* 305). However, the Woodman is not upset, for he claims that as long as Amie is happy then he is happy: "I am glad, however," said the Tin Woodman, "that I have found Nimmie Amee, and discovered that she is already married and happy. It will relieve me of any further anxiety concerning her" (*The Tin Woodman of Oz* 306). The Woodman returns home with the Scarecrow:

All this having been happily arranged, the Tin Woodman returned to his tin castle, and his chosen comrade, the Scarecrow, accompanied him on the way. The two friends were sure to pass many pleasant hours together in talking over their recent

adventures, for as they neither ate nor slept they found their greatest amusement in conversation (*The Tin Woodman of Oz* 320).

This ends the novel with a heartfelt display of the homosocial (possibly even further) relationship between these two friends who love each other so much. In the Land of Oz, individuals are truly given the freedom to be who they are and live how they please without any fear of scrutiny from their neighbors, creating an overall more welcoming world.

## CONCLUSION:

At the end of my research and writing on Baum's series of *Oz* books, I fully realized how important it is for one to re-examine works of children's literature from time to time. There have been a few instances in my adulthood where I have reread a book I loved as a child, but all it has usually done for me is merely reaffirm my nostalgic love for a book. The *Oz* series, on the other hand, has been a complete reawakening – it is as if I have been reading the series for the first time with new eyes. Within these books, I have uncovered complex themes regarding hopes and fears over technology and labor in the 1900s, restructuring of American government, and advanced progressive ideals in regards to feminism and gender identity. Most importantly, all of these ideas are delivered to children in a way that they can understand, analyze, and put into practice if they so desired.

However, the *Oz* series was not simply important for the readers, it was also crucial for their author. Baum used the *Oz* books as a means to help himself understand the world around him that was changing rapidly. From economic hardships to political unrest to World War I, Baum was struggling through one of the most hectic periods in American history, only to die immediately before temporary respite was found in the 1920s. In Baum's eyes, America as a whole was simply not working out and it was going to take some serious ideological restructuring for it to improve. This is why several ideas presented by Baum in the *Oz* series have an almost futuristic tone: mastery of technology



to help improve society, universal acceptance of individual identities, and even an economy that has progressed past the use of currency. Above all of his other ideas, I feel that what was most important to Baum was the well being of people. Consistent throughout all of the various fields of societal and political thought Baum theorizes is a desire for individuals from all walks of life to be happy, successful, and free to express themselves in their own unique ways. Politics described by some as “socialist” were in actuality Baum’s means of expressing his yearning to have all citizens’ basic needs met. From there, society could only move further and further beyond to encompass a universal acceptance of individuals of different backgrounds, beliefs, and identities. Because Baum’s books are so fantastical, some audiences are not made immediately aware of the incredibly humanistic themes tucked away within them. Baum used elements of fantasy in order to be completely unrestrained with his thought process. By telling himself that nothing was off limits in terms of what could or could not be possible in the land of Oz, Baum had the freedom to explore as many ideas in his head as possible – ideas that expressed a hope for a better future. For America and the rest of the world. Baum created a fantasy world to cope with the anxieties present in his own, with the intent of passing down these ideas to children: those with the ability to change the future and make it better.

In a way, we are going through a rather hectic period in American history ourselves. Times seem to be changing faster than we can follow as we too are experiencing dramatic shifts in technology, politics, and gender identity. All of this change can appear to be rather frightening, which is why I think that we need books like the *Oz* series now more than ever. When reality can be so grim, sometimes it helps to be

able to retreat to a fantasy world where anything is possible as long as one can imagine it. If there is a change in the world that is to be desired, in Oz that idea is free to take wings and be experimented with: whether it works out for everyone in the end or not it can at least be said that a new realm of thought was introduced and discussed. The Land of Oz is a veritable blue sky for challenging the status quo and thinking differently, and being able to do so freely is incredibly important no matter what time period we live in.

I am not quite sure if it is exactly the future that Baum would have wanted, but I think that he would at least appreciate that America has made as much progress as it has and would nonetheless be interested in how much American mindsets and policies have changed so drastically. If anything, I think that Baum could appreciate how society as a whole is more gradually beginning to accept different lifestyles, the individual is celebrated more now than perhaps it ever has before – and if there is any unique individual that still needs to be celebrated, it is L. Frank Baum.

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