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Utopian Tension in L. Frank Baum's Oz*

ANDREW KARP

NUMEROUS SCHOLARS have noted utopian aspects of the society depicted in the fourteen Oz books written by L. Frank Baum between 1900 and 1920.¹ These aspects include, among others, a communal sharing of food, the elimination of money and poverty, a dearth of punishment, an absence of greed reminiscent of Sir Thomas More, and the virtual elimination of death or disease. The Tin Woodman, for example, declares in *The Road to Oz*, "We have no rich, and no poor; for what one wishes the others all try to give him, in order to make him happy, and no one in all Oz cares to have more than he can use" (165).

Most scholars, however, have dismissed Baum's utopian society as a fairy tale paradise rife with inconsistencies and superficialities. As a result, they have neglected to explore the central political and philosophical concerns of his works: the conflict between the individual and the community and the thorny problem of how to create a unified and harmonious society out of a rag-tag assortment of wildly diverse individuals. 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 rights and freedom" or highest priority to "community life and the good of collectivities" (Taylor 1985, 182); 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" (Gordon and Newfield 77).

In developing the community of Oz, Baum seems to be trying to do the impossible: to create a world that combines the pastoral and artistic features of William Morris's utopia with the technological and urban advantages of Edward Bellamy's; to fashion a utopia that is simultaneously egalitarian and authoritarian; and to establish a society that values and protects individual rights, interests, and freedoms, as well as cultural multiplicity, at the same time as it promotes the value of a unified state to which individuals owe allegiance, a state created "E Pluribus Unum." While grappling with these seemingly irreconcilable polarities and displaying a satiric awareness of some of the problems within his seemingly idyllic community, Baum manages to

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address some fundamental questions about personal and communal identity, about what constitutes an individual self, and about what is natural and civilized for the individual and the community.

Despite the layers of tension encumbering these issues, however, Baum hints at a possible method for creating social harmony in the face of diversity. According to Baum, the society of Oz—and, by implication, the society of the United States—might be able to function harmoniously if individuals could possess a spirit of tolerance and an open-minded, unprejudiced respect for individuals and minorities. Baum inculcates this tolerance by erasing the distinction between human beings and the world around them, forcing humans to reevaluate their own narrow-minded and prejudiced views of what, for example, constitutes a “proper” diet, courage, or a living being. Utilizing a child’s perspective—a perspective that blurs the distinction between animate and inanimate, and reaches effortlessly for the commonality underlying diversity—Baum suggests a potential harmony based not just on fellow-feeling among disparate peoples but on a recognition of the consanguinity between human beings, nature, and the artificial and mechanical worlds. With this view, Baum, like a true rather than a humbug wizard, magically anticipates the multicultural and communitarian concerns of contemporary political theorists and utopians.

L. Frank Baum was familiar with utopian issues and with the utopian texts popular at the end of the late nineteenth century, particularly those of Bellamy and Morris. In 1891, he used Mrs. Bilkins, a fictional character in one of his Aberdeen newspaper columns, to parody *Looking Backward*. Like Julian West, Mrs. Bilkins falls into a deep sleep and dreams prophetically, “looking backward” (as her interlocutor Tom says) at the Aberdeen landscape five years into the future. She recounts a world of technological innovation and prosperity, a world in which, according to Mrs. Bilkins, “Everything progresses an’ evolutes an’ merges an’ bubbles an’ emanates an’ convalutes inter suthin’ else.”²

Also, following Bellamy’s lead, Baum constructs Oz with numerous mechanical and technological innovations: Wheelers with casters on their feet (*Ozma of Oz* 44); a car drawn by a bejeweled auto-dragon, eyes flashing “like the headlights of an automobile,” (*Lost Princess* 112); an Edison electric globe on the end of a dragon’s tail (*Tik-Tok of Oz* 142); a clockwork walking, talking “robot” called Tik-Tok (see Moore 143–46). Baum’s paean to technology occurs in one of his non-Oz works, *The Master Key*, published in 1901, which explores the wonders and potential dangers of electricity through a boy’s invocation of the Demon of Electricity. In Oz, magic is a science often performed in laboratories with pseudo-scientific instruments (see Bewley 18–19), and Baum himself praises imagination as leading to inventions such as “the steam engine, the telephone, the talking-machine and the automobile . . . [which] lead to the betterment of the world” (preface to *Lost Princess of Oz* ix).

Beyond the use of mechanical gadgets in Oz, Baum shares with Bellamy: 1) an emphasis on the centrality of the city, with the Emerald City

clearly the hub of Oz; 2) a centralized government (albeit monarchical rather than representative as in Bellamy [see Baum and McFall 201]); 3) a government that owns or controls all of the property (*The Emerald City of Oz* 30); 4) an economic system without money, buying or selling (*The Road to Oz* 165; *The Magic of Oz* 30);³ 5) a system that “guarantees the . . . comfortable maintenance of every citizen from the cradle to the grave” (Bellamy 149);⁴ and 6) an attitude of compassion toward the rare but occasional criminal (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 200, Bellamy 226).⁵

Baum’s debt to utopian authors goes beyond Bellamy, however. He was also an avid reader and admirer of William Morris. Numerous authors have noted resemblances between Oz and the land of *News from Nowhere*. They share a “rustic, medieval, handcraft way of life” and Oz, like Morris’s utopian England, is “an uncomplicated land of small farms and villages” with a Populist emphasis on agriculture and land (Baum and MacFall 201, cf. Moore 143). As Russell Nye points out in his 1994 “Appreciation,” Baum, like William Morris, has a constitutional dislike of the mass-produced item, whether a piece of furniture or a man (30). Morris, Baum, and Bellamy all, “dispensed with money in their never-never lands, supplying society’s needs from public warehouses,” and “for all, the hours of labor are short; life is easy, free of compulsions, and conducive to happiness” (Baum and MacFall 202).

Baum and his illustrator William Wallace Denslow were also aware of and probably influenced by the design values of William Morris as filtered through the indigenous Arts & Crafts movement flourishing in New York in the late 19th century (see Cumming and Kaplin). Denslow hand-illuminated books at Elbert Hubbard’s Roycroft Press in East Aurora, New York, where Hubbard established “his own version of William Morris’ Arts and Crafts Movement of Great Britain” (Hearn 1973, 22). And Baum himself was involved in book printing and design, and “descriptions and illustrations of the court dress in Oz . . . show a definite Morris-Hubbard influence” (Moore 56).

Taking bits and pieces of both Morris and Bellamy, however, creates a problem for Baum. How can he create a consistent utopian society that is both rural and urban, rustic and technological, egalitarian and hierarchical, individualistic yet community-oriented? Baum’s Oz, like the society of the United States, is caught on the line between technology and pastoralism, between the industrial present and the romanticized past—a thematic line that runs through life and literature in turn of the century United States.⁶ Like the Patchwork Girl Scraps, however, Baum manages to dance blithely but cunningly through this political morass, proposing ways to harmonize individualism and community while satirizing his own vision.

On the issue of individualism, Baum clearly sides with Morris to support freedom and the spirit of “rugged individualism.” Reacting against the submergence of the individual within the impersonal industrial corporation and the loss of independence and distinctness affecting wage earners in the United States (see Sandel 204ff.), Baum populates the Land of Oz with a

plethora of distinct and unique characters and has a number of these characters (as well as his narrators) praise individualism and eccentricity. The Cowardly Lion remarks: “To be individual, to be different from others, is the only way to become distinguished from the common herd. Let us be glad, therefore, that we differ from one another in form and in disposition. Variety is the spice of life and we are various enough to enjoy one another’s society . . .” (*The Lost Princess of Oz* 124–25).

Were we all Cowardly Lions or Shaggy Men or Sawhorses, we would all be common and, therefore, unremarkable. As Scraps, the animated rag doll, says, “To be different is to be distinguished” (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 193), and “I’m an Original, if you please, and therefore incomparable” (57). A similar view on individualism is espoused by the Scarecrow who tells Tommy Kwikstep (a boy with twenty legs): “But, after all, you have the pleasure of knowing you are unusual, and therefore remarkable among the people of Oz. To be just like other persons is small credit to one, while to be unlike others is a mark of distinction” (*The Tin Woodman of Oz* 116).⁷

Like William Morris, Baum also seems to value uniqueness and the crafting of unique products. Tip, in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* for example, uses a combination of magic and handicraft to create unique beings such as Jack Pumpkinhead and the Sawhorse. Like numerous Oz beings, the loveable Woozy, an animal composed entirely of cubes and rectangles, is a species unto himself. Even the main characters of Oz—think of Dorothy, Button-Bright, Ozma—are orphans, devoid of parents or real families, isolated and detached from others, and created so by Baum in order to play up their uniqueness and independence as well as their physical and spiritual isolation.⁸

Baum values uniqueness and unique individuals because: 1) he subscribes to an aesthetic of difference that derives pleasure from multiplicity, and associates multiplicity with originality and creativity; 2) he sees individuality as representing the last bastion of identity and self-expression. To assert one’s natural uniqueness—whether by writing original children’s stories or by possessing a unique physical form—is to affirm one’s identity in the face of the ever encroaching threat of assimilation into a faceless, homogeneous, industrialized mass. Baum’s characters express yearnings common both to children’s literature and fairy tales as well as to the “expressive individualism” characterized by 19th century writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and even Josiah Warren: a desire for self-reliance and autonomy, a need to assert one’s distinctness in the face of social pressures for conformity and uniformity, an urge to be free from society’s efforts to inculcate specific mores, a “yearning for leisure and freedom” (Brotman 167 and cf. Bellah 1985, 33 and 55; Kelly xvi and 51–52).

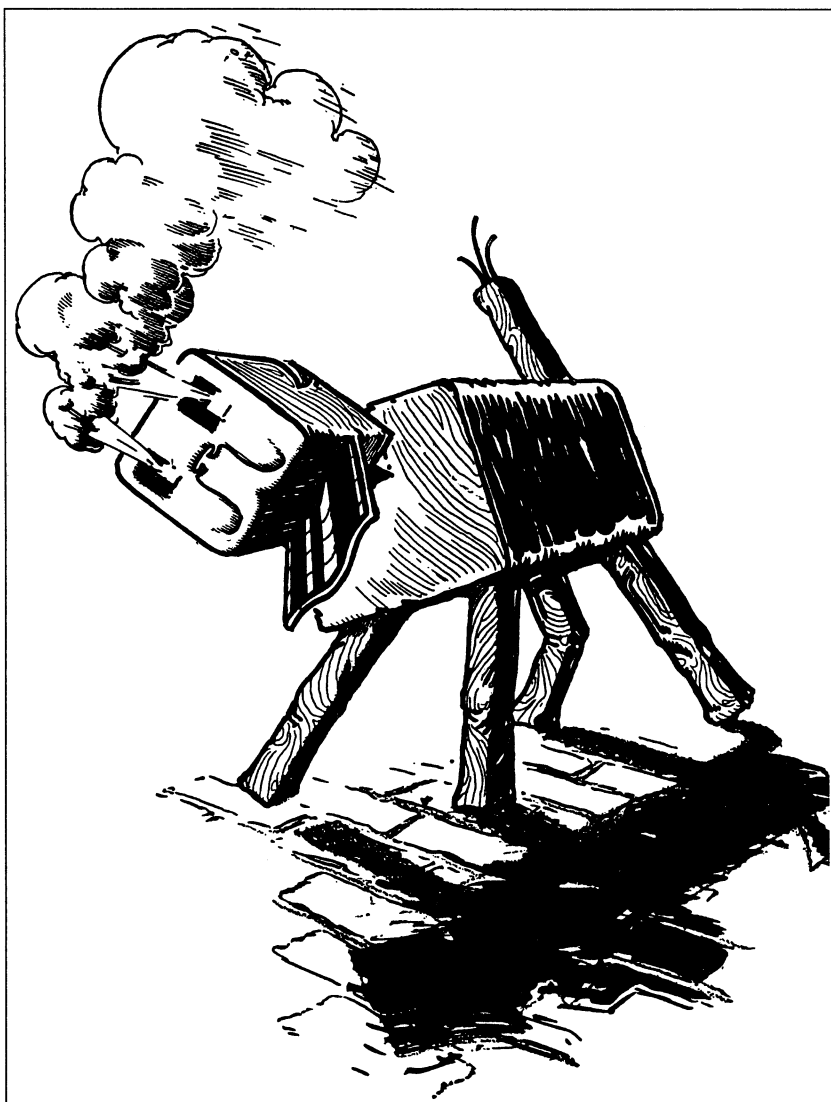
The elevation of the individual in Oz, however, seems to suggest a devaluation of the group. If to be “just like other persons is small credit to one,” as the Tin Woodman notes above, then one might avoid acting in concert with others or becoming part of a homogeneous group for fear of losing one’s prized individuality. Taken to the extreme, such a view threatens to establish a hierarchy of distinctness and to slide into elitist contempt for



Scraggs, the irrepressible Patchwork Girl of Oz, powders her nose (from *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*).

indistinct masses, a view that would smack of the very arrogance that Baum is trying to eliminate from Oz (see below pp. 115ff.).

Yet some of the characters in Oz express just such elitism. The Scarecrow, for example, remarks, “The only people worthy of consideration in this world are the unusual ones. For the common folks are like the leaves of a tree, and live and die unnoticed” (*The Marvelous Land of Oz* 188). This



The block-shaped Woozy flashes fire from his eyes (from *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*).

attitude bubbles up again in the role of work in Oz; although everyone is supposed to work half the time because they enjoy it, the primary and privileged characters spend all their time on adventures and parties and little or no time actually working to support the society, while those who live outside the Emerald City are obliged to “plow the land and raise grains . . . or fish in the rivers or herd” (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 185). Yet how can Oz

be an egalitarian society if there is such a dramatic difference between the distinct individuals and the faceless, working masses?

Baum might be able to avoid a potential problem in his devaluation of the group if everyone in Oz were unique and there really weren't any "faceless masses." But that isn't the case. Numerous places visited by the intrepid travelers are populated by cookie-cutter animated forms whose distinctiveness resides not in the individuals but in the uniqueness of the group or species as a whole. The spoon brigade of Utensia, for example (*The Emerald City of Oz* 169ff.), is made up of countless, seemingly identical spoons. In Oz, the truly unique individuals, such as the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, are more prominent and more powerful than the individual components of unique species or the nameless, working inhabitants of the four lands of Oz. As in the United States at the turn-of-the-century, certain individuals have risen to power while others have been relegated to faceless worker status.

This idealization of the individual poses serious challenges for social harmony, and Baum himself raises questions regarding unfettered individualism. Echoing the concern of de Tocqueville and current communitarians that individualism could eventually "dispose each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends," thereby undermining the conditions of freedom (de Toqueville 506, cf. Bellah 1985 viii and 37–38, Etzioni 1993 and 1995), Baum wonders how such a distinct and often opinionated collection of individuals can be free yet work together without conflict to create social harmony. If Oz is an egalitarian society of distinct individuals, who or what will bind them together? As Robert Bellah notes, "if the entire social world is made up of individuals, each endowed with the right to be free of others' demands, it becomes hard to forge bonds of attachment to, or cooperation with, other people, since such bonds would imply obligations that necessarily impinge on one's freedom" (Bellah 1985, 23).

Baum's answer is twofold. On the one hand, he asserts that Ozites possess an innate loving and considerate nature that draws them together. In Oz, unlike the U.S.A., individuals rarely use their power to harm or exploit others; in fact, they spend much of their time helping each other. This benevolent behavior arises not because it is imposed or inculcated from above by the monarch but because of the inherent goodness of most Ozites; they display the republican virtues which some of the framers of the Constitution may have prized and expected of all citizens. The band of "quaintly assorted" friends gathered around Ozma exercise much care to avoid hurting each others' feelings; "it was this considerate kindness that made them close friends and enabled them to enjoy one another's society" (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 218).

On the other hand, Baum argues that social harmony does, in fact, entail a restriction on individual freedom. Oz, like the United States, does not offer unlimited freedom to individuals and only appears to be egalitarian; in fact, the society is somewhat restrictive as well as stratified and hierarchical.⁹



King Kleaver holds Dorothy prisoner in the Kingdom of Utensia (from *The Emerald City of Oz*).

Individuals in Oz are not totally free nor do they have total privacy. All property is owned by the benevolent monarch and no one can choose a place of residence. As the Shaggy Man notes: "In this country, people live wherever our Ruler tells them to. It wouldn't do to have everyone live in the Emerald City, you know, for some must plow the land and raise grains and

fruits and vegetables, while others chop wood in the forests, or fish in the rivers, or herd the sheep and the cattle" (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 185). In addition, the government keeps a tight rein on "promiscuous technological development" (Brewley 19) by allowing only authorized individuals to perform magic (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 42, 174 and Sackett 276).

But why has Baum, so apparently a supporter of U.S. ideals in his personal life—populism, democracy, capitalism, and the concomitant values of privacy and freedom—created his utopian world as a socialist monarchy? On the one hand, of course, Baum recognizes the centrality of royalty to the fairy tale tradition, and his inclusion of a Queen in Oz fits his attempt to create a series of uniquely American fairy tales. In addition, Baum loves decoration and ornamentation and knows his readers will as well; consequently, he creates a fantasy world of sparkling jewels, fancy clothes, royal pomp, and a glitzy city (see Leach, "The Clown from Syracuse" 17–26 and "A Trickster's Tale" 162–67, 174–80).

On the other hand, however, Baum is also aware of the political implications of his choice. He sees the potential, if not the necessity, for conflict and exploitation in an economically-driven capitalist democracy based on freedom and self-interest. As Frederick Jackson Turner noted about the farmers, "they gradually learned that unrestrained competition . . . meant the triumph of the strongest . . . They learned that between the ideal of individualism, unrestrained by society, and the ideal of democracy, was an innate conflict" (203).

That Oz is a monarchy suggests Baum's awareness of the tension between unrestrained individualism and equalitarian democracy and his lack of confidence—like John Adams and the Federalists—in each American's ability to be "self-regulatory" (Takaki 10). In Baum's view, a country ruled by a strong, benevolent monarch who controls all the land and functions as a loving mother to all her people would surely be more harmonious than a country potentially ravaged by competitive democracy or uncontrollable passions and instinctual urges.

When the power of magic is used by "evil" individuals for their own personal aggrandizement, for example, Ozma, the benevolent monarch, insures social harmony by decreeing that no unauthorized individuals may perform magic in Oz (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 42 and 174). She acts solely for the good of the society and possesses the omniscience and wherewithal to enforce her decree. To rule for one's own benefit rather than for the benefit of the people would create an anti-utopian society such as the one represented by the High Coco-Lorum of Thi in *The Lost Princess of Oz*. He detests work, rules for his own benefit, and makes arbitrary rulings which he attributes to law (107–108). As he states, "In reality, I am the King, but the people don't know it. They think they rule themselves, but the fact is I have everything my own way. No one else knows anything about our laws, so I make the laws to suit myself" (108).

Baum's decision to create a strong central government in Oz might also be explained by a desire to parallel political developments at the turn of the

century. Just as Ozma is compelled to use her power to crack down on the unauthorized use of magic whose growing strength threatens to choke and enslave the entire population of Oz, so the federal government and the executive branch in turn-of-the-century America had to grow larger and stronger in order to contain the corporations whose use of technological magic posed a threat to the U.S. economy and its workers.

L. Frank Baum, however, is equally aware of the dangers of a top-down, restrictive system. Not everyone in Oz is happy with the limitations of freedom and the enforcement of cooperative civilization. The hidden question lurking beneath the surface of Oz, one raised most prominently by Rousseau, is whether civilization itself might not require beings to act contrary to their natures. The King of the Rabbits in *Bunnybury* is miserable because he is being forced to dress and act in a civilized way full of “pomp and foolishness” (211) when he prefers the freedom, danger, and wildness of uncivilized life. The Rabbit King speaks of his luxurious life as:

. . . all unnatural, my dear. Rabbits are out of place in such luxury. When I was young I lived in a burrow in the forest. I was surrounded by enemies and often had to run for my life. It was hard getting enough to eat, at times, and when I found a bunch of clover I had to listen and look for danger while I ate it. Wolves prowled around the hole in which I lived and sometimes I didn't dare stir out for days at a time. Oh, how happy and contented I was then! I was a real rabbit, as nature made me—wild and free!—and I even enjoyed listening to the startling throbbing of my own heart! (*The Emerald City of Oz* 210)

Although the Rabbit King eventually changes his mind, convinced that only a fool would exchange the life of luxury for the wild life of danger, we sense a loss here. The rabbits are not acting in accordance with their nature and, as the narrator says of the Whimsies—who wear pasteboard heads because ashamed of the contrast between their tiny door-knob heads and their large, strong bodies—“It is folly to try to appear otherwise than as nature has made us” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 61). A similar fate befalls the Winged Monkeys who, “Once . . . were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruits, and doing just as . . . [they] pleased without calling anybody master” (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 96)¹⁰ and the Porcupine, whose quills are taken away and sunk by the Shaggy Man even though the Porcupine argues that, “it is my nature to throw quills, and every animal must do what Nature intends” (*The Patchwork Girl of Oz* 156).

We sense this loss and unnaturalness as well in the fates of Dorothy's Uncle Henry and Aunt Em, who feel distinctly uncomfortable and useless when—transported to Oz—they are compelled to forego work and dress in luxurious court attire. Ozma's reluctant decision to offer them figure-head jobs as Keeper of the Jewels and Royal Mender of the Stockings (*The Emerald City of Oz* 192 and 195) only reinforces their loss of identity, purpose and freedom. As Dorothy tells her aunt, “You've got to be swell and high-toned in the Land of Oz, whether you want to or not” (*The Emerald City of Oz* 66–67). Why would Baum include such a scene if not to alert us to the

limitations and possible contradictions within the society of Oz? Is not Ozma here guilty of the worst of crimes: of imposing her own idiosyncratic views on others against their will? Has not the land of Oz, once praised for *not* being “civilized” because of the presence of wizards, witches, and magicians (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 8), become, like Kansas, all too civilized?

The civilized world of Oz is not all it is cracked up to be. In response to Dorothy’s question of why the animals living in Foxville do not wear just their own hairy skins, King Dox says they clothe themselves because they are civilized:

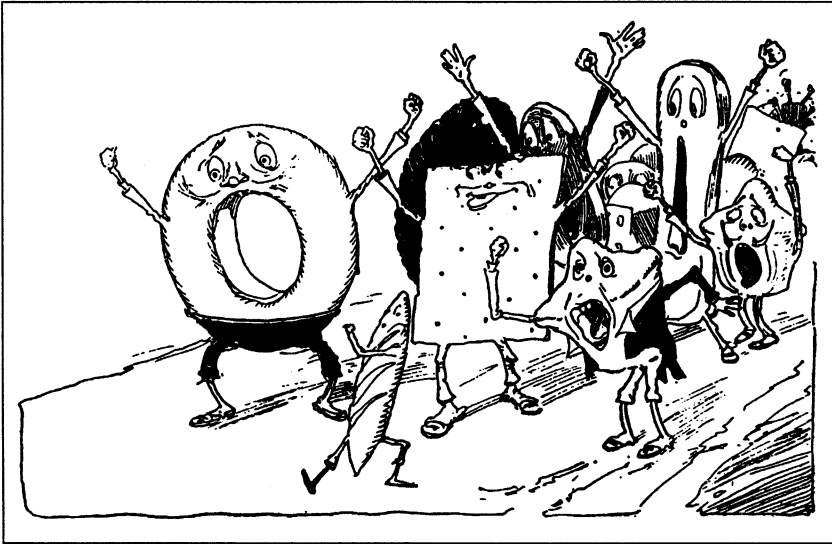
“But you were born without clothes,” she observed, “and you don’t seem to me to need them.”

“So were human beings born without clothes,” he replied; “and until they became civilized they wore only their natural skins. But to become civilized means to dress as elaborately and prettily as possible, and to make a show of your clothes so your neighbors will envy you, and for that reason both civilized foxes and civilized humans spend most of their time dressing themselves.” (*The Road to Oz* 44)

Like Swift, Baum seems to be satirizing the very utopian society he has established, asking probing questions about what an individual is and what it really means to be true or honest to one’s individual nature. Is it natural for human beings to live together in an elaborate society with restrictions on their freedom or is it more natural for them to live totally free as hunter gatherers in the wilds, mere “unaccommodated man”? What if one’s proper nature is to be mean and to take delight in others’ unhappiness? And how can society remain harmonious when creatures of different natures turn out to be natural enemies? When a hungry Dorothy visits Bunbury, whose living inhabitants are all made of bread, the tension is palpable; even though all the items in the town are either alive or someone’s private property, Dorothy demands to be fed and proceeds to consume a wheelbarrow and a piano before being driven out of town by angry citizens fearful of losing their property or of being eaten alive (*The Emerald City of Oz* 190)!

Baum recognizes such problems but doesn’t provide a practical solution within the confines of Oz. The army of invaders led by King Roquat the Red in *The Emerald City of Oz* is thwarted only by their drinking from the Waters of Oblivion. Through forgetfulness, through complete loss of identity and individuality, certain problem individuals can be tamed. In Baum’s world, such a baptism washes away all negative individuality and allows one’s natural goodness to reemerge. But how can one prize individualism at the same time as one sees the necessity of eliminating such individualism in the name of social good?

The question of which world is better—the civilized or uncivilized—cuts to the heart of the tension in Oz and to the tension within the United States. How does one reconcile industrialization and agrarianism? Should we or can we turn our backs on technology in order to recapture a rural past? Considering these conflicts, how can the United States manage to create harmony while protecting rampant individualism? Although Baum



The Citizens of Bunbury (including Mr. Cinnamon Bunn and the Crumpets) hoot and holler as they drive out Dorothy, Toto, and Billina for devouring some of their citizens (from *The Emerald City of Oz*).

claims that he is promoting an imagination in his readers that fosters scientific development and “civilization” (preface to *The Lost Princess of Oz* ix), his world, at the same time, seems to undermine that very notion of civilization and to idealize the natural, pastoral, and “uncivilized.”

In a world in which glass cats and pumpkins can come alive with the Powder of Life, Baum seems to be calling into question the very idea of an individual nature. How, Baum seems to be asking, in a modern world of technological and animated objects, where automobiles and moving pictures and now computers are compelling us to reevaluate our definitions of nature, life, and personal identity, how can one determine what one’s proper nature is? What exactly is it to be an individual? Can one be an individual in isolation or does one need to be part of a community in order to define one’s individualism? And even if one can make such a determination, what will prevent the clash of individual natures from undermining social order?

Despite Baum’s raising of these unanswerable questions, he does, I believe, suggest one possible way to reconcile the individual and the community, and this solution emerges from his critique of unfettered individualism.

Unfettered individualism has unfortunate consequences on select beings in Oz and on the society as a whole. The Phonograph Player and the Gump are examples of two objects brought to life who seem to regret their own uniqueness and who believe themselves better off inanimate or dead. Brought to life accidentally by the Powder of Life in *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, the Phonograph plays classical music everyone hates; when he asks indignantly why he was created, no one can provide an answer (136).

And the Gump, a living vehicle created out of an Elk's head and two sofas in order to save Tip and his friends, begs to be taken to pieces. When he says, "I did not wish to be brought to life and I am greatly ashamed of my conglomerate personality" (*The Marvelous Land of Oz* 284), his suicidal wish is granted by the monarch. Even Jack Pumpkinhead, in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, oozes with sadness and anxiety when he realizes that his pumpkinhead could spoil or be crushed at any time. While the unhappiness of these characters may have more to do with their unnaturalness than their uniqueness, Baum still seems to be suggesting that individuality in and of itself is not sufficient for happiness.

Baum also seems aware that those individuals who control the power (and the Powder), if they are not virtuous, can use that power to exploit others in the name of individualism. The many unique characters created by the magic Powder of Life seem unnatural and somewhat strained, in part because they have all been created by the whim or for the service of their creators. Baum makes his political satire clear when he describes why Margolette, the Magician's wife, wants to bring a brainless and multi-colored rag doll to life: she wants a "colored" slave who will do all her menial work without complaining or talking back. Although she does bring the Patchwork Girl to life, the experiment backfires. Not only does Scraps end up with cleverness, thanks to Ojo, and consequently becomes far from a cooperative slave, but Margolette pays the price for her attempted exploitation by being herself turned from an animate creature to inanimate stone, deprived even of the freedom of movement.

Clearly, radical individualism can pose a threat to the social order, as numerous communarians have recently pointed out (e.g. Etzioni 1996, 39). A number of unique individuals and species both inside and outside the boundaries of Oz are hostile to others and pose threats to the stability of Oz. The Mangaboos, the Wooden Gargoyles, and the Dragonettes in *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*, like the Growleywogs, Whimsies and Phanfasm[sic] of the Emerald City, pose numerous threats to Dorothy and her entourage. The narrator even says of the Growleywogs, who are gigantic in size but all skin and bone: "to be different from your fellow creatures is always a misfortune" (*The Emerald City of Oz* 80). This sentiment indicates that individualism can become both a source of anxiety for those individuals who see themselves as different from others as well as a source of ridicule (directed toward the individual) from those who see difference as inferiority or who attach undue value to their own characteristics. In *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, for example, the arrogant Glass Cat—whose body is transparent and who boasts that her pink brains are unique because "you can see 'em work"—has the audacity to make fun of Scraps and call her ugly because she is the only multi-colored being in the all-blue Munchkin Country (72). Through such mini-confrontations between the various creatures of Oz, Baum indicates the absurdity of one individual or one racial group trying to impose a single standard for appearance or behavior.

These confrontations reveal another, more serious danger of individualism: it can promote arrogance and conflict if individuals have contempt for



Tip sprinkles the Magic Powder of Life on the Sawhorse as Jack Pumpkinhead looks on (from *The Marvelous Land of Oz*).

those who are different from themselves or try to impose their own unique views or forms on others. Numerous characters including Dorothy—in a stance quite reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s Alice—display such initial arrogance. The effort by individuals to impose themselves on others causes conflict in Oz. As Marius Bewley notes, in pointing out the importance of selfless love in Oz, “. . . the ultimate meaning of Oz history [is that] the

aggrandizement of the individual and private self at the expense of others is the root of all evil” (Bewley 19, developing a point from Nye 10). The young inhabitants of the very young land of Oz, like the citizens of the very young United States, assume that their own idiosyncratic patterns of behavior are and should be universally applicable. Such behavior results in discrimination against those who are different in species, color, race, eating habits, etc.

In *The Road to Oz*, for example, King Dox, king of the foxes, believes he is doing a favor to the boy Button-Bright and the Shaggy Man when he transforms their human heads into fox heads. The humans are not amused; instead they are miserable and only regain their happiness when the transformation is reversed. As Brian Atterbery has pointed out:

What Mombi and her fellow villains do is to impose a new shape on an unwilling victim. What Dorothy and her friends do is to restore victims to their original form . . . The one act is a taking away, the other a giving back of something highly prized in Oz, one’s true identity. To alter another’s shape is to fail to respect his identity as a living being. (180)

Even the “good” characters in Oz, however, sometimes exploit unwilling victims. Tip—who is actually Ozma, the ruler of Oz, in a transformed state—imposes shape and life on numerous figures. He/she creates the Sawhorse without ever consulting him about his wishes. And Dorothy herself, although not guilty of literally trying to impose shape on others, does, at times, display the arrogance of the ethical imperialist. In her exchange with the talking chicken in *Ozma of Oz* over what constitutes civilized behavior, Dorothy proves herself more rigid and less tolerant than her raft-mate. When the hen informs Dorothy that her name is Bill, Dorothy insists on calling the chicken Billina instead, unwilling to believe that Bill is a proper female name and unwilling to respect Bill’s wishes. Bill, however, is far more flexible and doesn’t get her feathers up about it: she believes names are mere signifiers and, consequently, doesn’t care what Dorothy calls her as long as she “knows the name means me” (31).

Baum continues this satire on the narrowness of the human perspective when Dorothy and Billina debate what constitutes a “proper” breakfast. When Billina expresses interest in eating some “fat red ants, and some sand-bugs, and once in a while a tiny crab,” Dorothy condemns such cannibalistic behavior:

“You ought to be ’shamed of yourself!” she proclaims.

“Goodness me!” returned the hen, in a puzzled tone; “how queer you are, Dorothy! Live things are much fresher and more wholesome than dead ones, and you humans eat all sorts of dead creatures.”

“We don’t!” said Dorothy.

“You do, indeed,” answered Billina. “You eat lambs and sheep and cows and pigs and even chickens.”

“But we cook ’em,” said Dorothy, triumphantly.

“What difference does that make?”

“A good deal,” said the girl, in a graver tone. “I can’t just ’splain the difference, but it’s there. And, anyhow, we never eat such dreadful things as bugs.”

“But you eat the chickens that eat the bugs,” retorted the yellow hen, with an odd cackle. “So you are just as bad as we chickens are.” (*Ozma of Oz* 34)

If Dorothy and Billina are to live together harmoniously, on equal footing, then Dorothy must accept the arbitrariness of her own social conventions and forgo trying to impose her behavior patterns on others. This interchange, along with the points made above, demonstrate Baum's understanding that, in order for Oz to be a true utopia, individuals must learn to rise above their prejudices and unfounded preconceptions, specifically those that assert their own individual superiority, and must resist imposing their own views or shapes on others. For Baum, human suffering results from narrow-mindedness or prejudice, the inability to recognize that one's own world view is not universally true or universally applicable to others. And the worst crime is trying to impose one's own paternalistic or idiosyncratic views on others.

The unique feature of Baum's emphasis on open-mindedness as a criterion for social harmony, however, is its application beyond human beings. Not only does Baum satirize the unfounded drawing of distinctions (and value judgments) based on appearance (think of the virtuous but scruffy Shaggy Man) or gender (think of the Tip=Ozma equation), but his work suggests that he sees no fundamental distinction between the animate and inanimate world, between the pastoral and mechanical world, or between the inanimate and natural worlds. In Oz, anything and everything can be "alive" and, consequently, worthy of respect and rights, from rainbows to silverware to robots to rag dolls. Although Baum recognizes the humor and the pleasure we all derive from imagining strange creatures and from bringing inanimate creatures to life, he also seems to be subscribing to the multiculturalist position that Charles Taylor calls "the politics of dignity," "based on the idea that all humans [for Baum, 'beings'] are equally worthy of respect" (Taylor 1992, 41 and cf. 68). Such a view anticipates current multicultural theories and suggests that Baum, like Horace Kallen in 1915, may be rejecting assimilationism in favor of cultural pluralism (Gordon and Newfield 80–86).

While the consanguinity between humans and nature and the belief in the animation of all elements in the natural universe has its roots in American and European Romanticism, the addition of the artificial and mechanical worlds to the mix adds a distinctly modern and industrial edge to Baum's utopian vision. The value system that defines the utopia of Oz is not restricted to human beings or minorities but is extended to include inanimate and mechanical beings as well as flora and fauna.

Thus, despite the preeminence of individualism in Oz, the society functions only when citizens learn to squelch their pride and arrogance and learn to act cooperatively, for the welfare of the group or the country as whole, rather than in their own self-interest. According to the Wizard in *The Lost Princess of Oz*, "We must go to the Shoemaker [Ugu] in one mighty band, for only in union is there strength" (207 and cf. 197–98). Most of the Oz stories are examples of the effectiveness of cooperative action in overcoming fear and danger, or in satisfying social and unselfish desires, and the Ozites' cooperative action suggests the "importance of cooperation to individualism"

stressed by Populist thinkers such as Henry George and Laurence Gronlund (in his 1884 work *The Cooperative Commonwealth*) (Lustig 72–73).

Although Baum's questions are ultimately more probing than his answers, he provides a fascinating framework for social harmony by creating a world that attempts to eliminate prejudice and to replace that prejudice with cooperation and respect not just between human beings but between human beings and the world around them, a world that includes animals, vegetables, minerals, and machines, the artificial products of human craft. In a world of clones and genetic engineering, of virtual reality and artificial intelligence, where the boundaries between life and death and between biological and mechanical are becoming more and more blurred, are we not in need now, more than ever, of finding a way to learn from Baum's cooperative vision?

NOTES

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1. See Wagenknecht, Sackett, Baum and MacFall (201–202), Erisman (620), Brotman (159–60), Bauska (22), Atterbery (85–87), Nye (10–12), Zipes (119–38). Only Bewley and Earle emphasize, as I do, the role of tension in the Oz books; their focus, however, is almost exclusively on the tension between technology and pastoralism.

2. From "She Reads A Chapter in 'Looking Backward' to the Astonished and Interested Boarders," column appearing on Jan. 31, 1891, in the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*; reprinted in Baum, *Our Landlady* (163). For other comparisons between Baum and Bellamy, see Atterbery (88), Papanikolas (101).

3. This economic system, however, is not in place in the first book of the series, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, where "Green candy and green pop-corn were offered for sale, as well as green shoes, green hats and green clothes of all sorts. At one place a man was selling green lemonade, and when the children bought it Dorothy could see that they paid for it with green pennies" (61).

4. In Oz, Ozma supplies food to the citizens only in times of shortage. At all other times, Baum describes a system of community sharing. "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 storehouse of the Ruler, which were afterward filled up again when there was more of any article than the people needed" (*The Emerald City of Oz* 31). Despite this statement, there are few examples of such sharing in the Oz works.

5. In *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (200), Tollydiggle the Jailer says, "We consider a prisoner unfortunate. He is unfortunate in two ways—because he has done something wrong and because he is deprived of his liberty. Therefore we should treat him kindly, because of his misfortune, for otherwise he would become hard and bitter and would not be sorry he had done wrong. Ozma thinks that one who has committed a fault did so because he was not strong and brave; therefore she puts him in prison to make him strong and brave. When that is accomplished he is no longer a prisoner, but a good and loyal citizen and everyone is glad that he is now strong enough to resist doing wrong. You see, it is kindness that makes one strong and brave and so we are kind to our prisoners."

6. See Bewley (18) in his review of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral* (Oxford 1964) and Earle xiv–xv who sees a tension between the "dazzling but

sterling Emerald City” and the “common hopes and hazards of a tiny ekklesia exploring their own best hopes along the Yellow Brick Road.”

7. See Raylyn Moore (10) who notes Baum’s insistence on the worth of the individual, including the idea that eccentricity is an indication of merit. Also Erisman (618) who notes that, “Baum gives to the people of Oz an unfailing respect for the individual,” and “To the Ozians, anonymity is a curse: only through individuality can a person achieve a complete existence.”

8. The orphan children in Oz reflect Baum’s awareness of: 1) the popular tradition of spunky, independent literary orphans in British and American 19th century fiction (e.g. Dickens, Alger, Twain, Johanna Spyri’s *Heidi*, Lucy Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess*); 2) the orphan heroine of fairy tales who must learn to survive without a mother and against the opposition of hostile mother/stepmother figures (e.g. Cinderella and Snow White, on which see Jones 93 for an excellent fairy-tale analysis of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*); and 3) the historical issue of orphans and orphanism prominent in the late 19th century with orphan trains placing out poor, urban children into Midwestern families (see Holt). On the feeling of drift and isolation for individuals in the early twentieth century, see Lippman 92 and 118.

9. Earle notes the class divisions in Munchkin Country (e.g. the rich Munchkin Boq) and the general economic disparity in Oz (75).

10. Littlefield (55), in his famous article on Oz as a “Parable on Populism,” draws a parallel between the exploitation of the Winged Monkeys and that of the American Plains Indians in the 19th century. Littlefield is one of the few scholars to note the irony in Baum’s portrait of Oz and, by parallel, Baum’s allegorical critiques of the United States.

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