

The Gold Standard as the Yellow Brick Road...

"After a few hours the road began to be rough, and the walking grew so difficult that the Scarecrow often stumbled over the yellow brick, which were here very uneven. Sometimes, indeed, they were broken or missing altogether, leaving holes that Toto jumped across and Dorothy walked around. As for the Scarecrow, having no brains he walked straight ahead, and so stepped into the holes and fell full length on the hard bricks."

In the late 1890s, a major issue was the currency of the United States. The gold standard was perceived as insufficient and was already almost cornered by Jim Fisk and Jay Gould. Baum, like many others, favored bimetallism. Here, he reveals his opinion that although the gold standard had holes and obstacles, it could still last through the long haul. He wanted to point out the problems of the gold standard and how it effected the farmers. After all, the farmers had suffered through grueling droughts, and watched as the prices of the foods that they produced plummeted in spite and probably because of over production.

Silver Coinage as the Silver Shoes...

"'The Witch of the East was proud of those silver shoes,' said one of the Munchkins; 'and there is some charm connected with them; but what it is we never knew.'"

"At that moment Dorothy saw lying on the table the silver shoes that had belonged to the Witch of the East. 'I wonder if they will fit me,' she said to Toto. 'They would be just the thing to take a long walk in, for they could not wear out.'"

Supporters of the silver movement argued that it had the elasticity and abundance to last for a long time. Dorothy likewise felt the silver shoes to "be just the thing to take a long walk in, for they could not wear out." Additionally, the Wicked Witch of the East was proud of the silver shoes because "there is some charm connected with them." The banker bosses during that time had the power to control money but the addition of silver to the gold standard would dampen their ability to hold power by money. This would be the answer to poor Dorothy's problems. In the years leading to the Free Silver Election, the farmers had been decimated by drought, robbed by the railroads, and hurt by the banks. After growing tired of this, the farmers retaliated, in the form of governmental programs, legislation, and the election of persons sympathetic to their plight into important offices.

Mid America/Farmers at its Best as Dorothy

Dorothy, the heroine, symbolizes mid-America at its best -- honest and open-hearted.

"She (the Witch of the West) looked down at Dorothy's feet, and seeing the Silver Shoes, began to tremble with fear, for she knew what a powerful charm belonged to them. At first the Witch was tempted to run away from Dorothy; but she happened to look into the child's eyes and saw how simple the soul behind them was, and that the little girl did not know of the wonderful power the Silver Shoes gave her."

In Baum's mind, the nation was unknowing and innocent. They always had the chance to implement silver, but they were too "simple" to realize its power. Dorothy owned the power of the silver shoes but was too innocent to recognize it. In this passage, Baum reveals his opinion that the railroad barons and banker bosses fed off of the innocence of the nation (Dorothy).

William Jennings Bryan as the Cowardly Lion...

And the Cowardly Lion who tags along depicts none other than William Jennings Bryan, the leader whose lack of courage finally caused him to betray the pro-silver cause.

"I learned that if I roared very loudly every living thing was frightened and got out of my way. Whenever I've met a man I've been awfully scared; but I just roared at him, and he has always run away as fast as he could go."

Bryan, who never actually won a presidential election, ran many times, including the 1896 election against William McKinley. In speeches such as the "Cross of Gold", Bryan was known for his tremendous oratory skills. Baum symbolized his strong words but less powerful actions in the ways of the cowardly lion, who roared loudly but tightened with fear.

An Eastern Worker/Industry as the Tin Woodsman...

The Tin Woodsman who joins them represents the American worker whose grinding labours have left him, at least for a time, rusted and heartless.

"He (the Cowardly Lion) struck at the Tin Woodman with his sharp claws. But, to the Lion's surprise, he could make no impression on the tin, although the Woodman fell over in the road and lay still."

The eastern laborers of Baum's era were often cruelly subjected to long hours, low pay, and an inability to argue for themselves because labor unions were prohibited and the ones that existed were powerless. Baum noted in this passage how William Jennings Bryan could not get the vote of the worker during his election. Baum was taking a stand against the approach of the Populists and Bryan. He contended that the worker could find his own solution just as the Tin Woodsman, in accepting his fake heart, found his own emotions.

Or as Industry who doesn't stop, and needs oil to survive.

A Midwestern Farmer as the Scarecrow

The Scarecrow she meets symbolizes the Western farmer who thinks he has no brain but turns out to be more capable and intelligent than he realizes.

"As for the Scarecrow, having no brains he walked straight ahead, and so stepped into the holes and fell at full length on the hard bricks. It never hurt him, however, and Dorothy would pick him up and set him upon his feet again, while he joined her in laughing merrily at his own mishap."

Baum's experiences during the droughts that he observed in Aberdeen, SD made him sympathize for the farmer. He took a stand in favor of the motives of the common farmer as represented by the Scarecrow. For this character, Baum contradicted his theme, which pointed out that the individual could find the solution to his dilemma. Baum suggested for the Scarecrow that farmers do need some aid. In the story, the Scarecrow doesn't have a brain, but nonetheless solves most of the group's problems. During the worst phases of the drought, farmers, pleading for help from the government and banks, found refuge only in themselves. However, they also would hurt themselves at times. They reasoned that since the prices of their goods were so low, all they needed to do to make up the extra income is produce more. In fact, during the drought America saw one of its largest food-production increases in history. This only led to price decreases and why Baum made the Scarecrow without a brain.

William McKinley/Mark Hanna as the Wizard of Oz and Oz (oz.) = gold standard...

"'No; you are all wrong,' said the little man, meekly. 'I have been making believe. 'Making believe!' cried Dorothy. 'Are you not a great Wizard?' 'Hush, my dear,' he said; 'don't speak so loud, or you will be overheard--and I should be ruined. I'm supposed to be a Great Wizard.' 'And aren't you?' she asked. 'Not a bit of it, my dear; I'm just a common man.' 'You're more than that,' said the Scarecrow, in a grieved tone; 'you're a humbug.' 'What is that (a balloonist)?' asked Dorothy. 'A man who goes up in a balloon on circus day, so as to draw a crowd of people together and get them to pay to see the circus,' he explained."

Mark Hanna presented William McKinley, who won the election of 1896, as a great man and coerced the people into electing him, even though he was simply a common man. The Wizard of Oz was "supposed to be a Great Wizard," but was in reality just an ordinary man. Baum supported the common man and objected to Mark Hanna's dominance.

A Banker Boss as the Wicked Witch of the East

"'She was the wicked Witch of the East, as I said,' answered the little woman. 'She has held all the Munchkins in bondage for many years, making them slave for her night and day. Now they, are all set free, and are grateful to you for the favour.'"

The banker bosses during the late 1800s easily controlled manufacturing and business in the east using such methods as trusts and interlocking directorates. The common worker, especially the child worker, suffered at the expense of the profits of these banker bosses. In Oz, the Wicked Witch of the East held the Munchkins—Italians, Jews, etc., in bondage, who were forced to "slave for her night and day."

A Railroad Baron/or also Bank as the Wicked Witch of the West

"She (the Witch of the West) looked down at Dorothy's feet, and seeing the Silver Shoes, began to tremble with fear, for she knew what a powerful charm belonged to them. At first the Witch was tempted to run away from Dorothy; but she happened to look into the child's eyes and saw how simple the soul behind them was, and that the little girl did not know of the wonderful power the Silver Shoes gave her. So the Wicked Witch laughed to herself, and thought, 'I can still make her my slave, for she does not know how to use her power.' Then she said to Dorothy, harshly and severely, 'Come with me; and see that you mind everything that I tell you, for if you do not I will make an end to you, as I did of the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow.'"

The monopolistic railroad barons of the late 1800s ruled over the common workers and farmers, controlling the farmers shipping expenses and manipulating the earnings of railroad workers. In the same way, the Wicked Witch of the West made an end to the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow. Many people, including Baum, feared that the population of the US (Dorothy) would be the next victim.

Or, some also believe that the Wicked Witch of the West was also the banks and controlled the Winged Monkeys who were the Railroads, and with their help controlled the Winkies (Chinese railroad workers). Dorothy eventually kills The Witch of the West by throwing a bucket of water on the witch. This act displays the power of the farmer to free themselves from the shackles of the banks if only farmers can manage the advantage of water.

Bank or the South as the Good Witch of the South

The Good Witch of the South, who is Baum's favorite, advises Dorothy about her slippers, sets the Quadlings free, and rewards the Cowardly Lion, Tinman, and Scarecrow.

The Plains Indians or Railroads as the Winged Monkeys...

"'Once,' began the leader, 'we were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruit, and doing just as we pleased without calling anybody master. Perhaps some of us were rather too full of mischief at times, flying down to pull the tails of the animals that had no wings, chasing birds, and throwing nuts at the people who walked in the forest. But we were careless and happy and full of fun, and enjoyed every minute of the day. This was many years ago, long before Oz came out of the clouds to rule over this land.'"

The Plains Indians, in the 1890s, were unable to find a home anywhere in America. At this time, the frontier was dying out, and the US government was unable to send them west again. Baum explains the very similar situation the Winged Monkeys endured through in this passage.

Or, the Banks/Witches controlled the Winged Monkeys/Railroads and used them to help control the Winkies/Workers.

Imperialism Represents the Cat and the Mouse...

"He (the Tin Woodman) saw a strange beast come bounding over the grass towards them. It was, indeed, a great, yellow wildcat, and the Woodman thought it must be chasing something, for its ears were lying close to its head and its mouth was wide open, showing two rows of ugly teeth, while its red eyes glowed like balls of fire. As it came nearer the Tin Woodman saw that running before the beast was a little gray field-mouse, and although he had no heart he knew it was wrong for the wildcat to harm such a pretty, harmless creature.

So the Woodman raised his axe, and as the wildcat ran by he gave it a quick blow that cut the beast's head clean off from its body, and it rolled over at his feet in two pieces."

America was entering the arena of worldwide imperialism in the 1890s. Baum was not a supporter of this movement. To support his stand against American imperialism, he incorporated this passage into the story. The passage illustrates the Tin Woodman's heart for the weaker creature as well as Baum's sympathies for the weaker country, which could have easily been the Philippines.

Geography of Oz...

E The eastern region of the land of Oz, the blue land of the Munchkins, paralleled the United States east coast. There was a distinctive slave-master relationship between the Munchkins and the Wicked Witch of the East that symbolized the mistreatment of eastern workers in factories, at banks, and at the voting booths.

W The west in Oz was inhabited by the Winged Monkeys and the Winkies. The Winged Monkeys were symbols of the plains Indians and the Winkies represented frontiersmen. Baum described the land with the words, "as they advanced the ground became rougher and hillier, for there were no farms nor houses in this country of the West, and the ground was untilled." These words could describe the terrain of Baum's South Dakota perfectly.

N Although, the travelers never encounter the land of the Gillikans during the first book, its purple color and mountainous terrain that are incorporated in later editions of the Oz collection suggest the areas of northern Michigan and Minnesota.

S The best connection between Baum's life and the southern land of the Quadlings was that Baum travelled through Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri selling china and he included a country of china having *"a floor as smooth and shining and white as the bottom of a big platter. Scattered around were many houses made entirely of china."*