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THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF THE WEST

L. FRANK BAUM IN SOUTH DAKOTA, 1888-91

NANCY TYSTAD KOUPAL

On 25 January 1890, L. Frank Baum took over the editor's chair of a weekly newspaper in northeastern South Dakota. Stricken with "western fever," the thirty-four-year-old Baum had emigrated from Syracuse, New York, more than a year earlier "to throw [his] fortunes in with the town" of Aberdeen, a promising railroad hub in what was then Dakota Territory.¹ His first frontier enterprise, a variety store modeled on "The Fair" in Chicago, was too ambitious for the time and place, but Baum retained his faith in the West and turned to a career more suited to his talents and training. In the next fourteen months, the transplanted Yankee filled the pages of his newspaper with impassioned essays, political poetry, satirical humor,

and some of the most exuberant and inventive local reporting ever undertaken in the West. For westerners, Baum's newspaper is a remarkable record of the year 1890. For all those who love the Oz books, it is a blueprint of the thought processes and ideas that figure in his most famous book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and its first sequel, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904).

Recent scholarship has focused on the regional nature of Baum's fairyland of Oz. Calling the *Wizard* a "parable on populism," a "dramatization" of the "progressive dilemma," and a regional fairy tale, critics have suggested that Baum's retail and newspaper work in South Dakota is the source of his agrarian sympathies.² Because this western chapter in the author's life has not itself been seriously studied, however, literary critics have generally missed the fact that Baum's perceptions of woman suffrage, something he examined in his second Oz novel, are also heavily drawn from his Dakota days. Baum's weekly newspaper, the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, is the key to an exploration of Baum's frontier years. The newspaper is both the reason for, and product of, the only period in Baum's life when his energies were channeled solely into the creation of nonfiction materials for a

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general adult reading audience.³ As a result, its pages represent some of the only extant source materials in which his ideas on politics, woman suffrage, prohibition, religion, and other contemporary concerns were conceptualized and recorded. Ten years later, those ideas provided the underpinning for his greatest literary achievements.

By July 1888, Baum had decided that competition in the crowded East kept people from prosperity. "In this struggling mass of humanity," he wrote, "a man like myself is lost." For Baum, the West was the land of opportunities, "where an intelligent man may profit." Specifically, Baum had concluded that Aberdeen, Dakota Territory, was the place for him to relocate. A whirlwind trip to the area in June 1888 had convinced him that the town was destined "to be a good city, and it *may be* a metropolis."⁴ At the time, both the condition of Baum's career in the East and family circumstances in the West contributed to his decision to move to Dakota Territory.

At thirty-two years of age in 1888, Baum had sampled an impressive number of professions. An indulged child of a wealthy New York State family, he had owned (with his brother) his own printing press and published his own newspaper at age fourteen. Less than three years later, he had begun a successful job-printing operation and started a literary newspaper. At age seventeen, he had worked briefly as a reporter for the *New York World*, and at nineteen, he had edited a newspaper in Pennsylvania. By 1878, he had spent a year in the family dry goods store and was then raising fancy chickens on the family estate near Syracuse. This occupation gave way to an acting career, and in 1882, Baum added playwrighting to his skills with a successful musical comedy entitled *The Maid of Arran*. For the next couple of years, he wrote plays and toured with his own theatre company. He met and married Maud Gage in November 1882, and with his wife's first pregnancy in 1883, he left the theatre, going into another family concern in Syracuse. The Baum family fortunes had changed, however, and se-

rious competition, a lack of investment capital, and poor business practices led Baum to seek greater opportunities elsewhere.⁵

The West was a natural place for him to look. Dakota Territory had been experiencing a boom since the late 1870s, and many Syracuse-area residents had moved to the east-central section of the territory, including members of Maud Gage Baum's family. Her brother, T. Clarkson Gage, had run a successful general store in Aberdeen since 1881. Her oldest sister, Helen Leslie Gage, and her husband Charles (also named Gage) owned real estate in Aberdeen and seemed to be doing well. Equally important, Maud Baum's other sister, Julia Gage Carpenter, and her husband Frank had taken a claim near Ellendale in 1882, and a year later, Frank Carpenter had become bookkeeper for bonanza wheat farmer S. C. Dalrymple, a member of the successful agribusiness family of northern Dakota. In the mid-1880s, Dakota promised to repeat the successful frontier pattern of Minnesota and Iowa, and Baum wanted to go West and prosper with the new country.⁶

Looking over Aberdeen in the summer of 1888, Baum decided that the town could use a "bazaar." "Not a 5¢ store," he specifically stated, "but a Bazaar on the same style as the 'Fair' in Chicago." It would sell fancy goods—willowware, crockery, camera supplies, books, sporting goods, and so on. Baum planned to promote it ambitiously, bringing out a small printing press to issue daily advertising bulletins and starting camera and sporting clubs in order to interest people in his fancy goods. Baum's Bazaar opened on the first of October 1888, and for a while it seemed to do well, but as one of Baum's contemporaries would later observe, Baum had come to Aberdeen "between booms, after the first strikes and cleanups had been made and everything was down on a rock bottom basis."⁷

Drought had set in, and the wheat crop of 1889 was not good. Farmers and townspeople had little to spend on nonessential items. Sister-in-law Helen Gage, who had rented him the store building and would later take over the business, concluded that Baum was unable to

adjust his enterprise to the hard times. "He had," she said, "let his taste run riot in his choice of the eastern markets," and "generally speaking it was too impractical a store for a frontier town."⁸ In an editorial on mercantile practices written a few months after the business folded, Baum probed the heart of the matter when he wrote that customers cry "not so much for genuine worth as for something pretty and attractive at a low cost."⁹

Although the bank closed Baum's Bazaar on 1 January 1890, L. Frank Baum had not given up on the West. Instead, he moved to a profession for which his background better fitted him. He took over the *Dakota Pioneer*, the weekly newspaper of fellow Syracuse transplant John H. Drake, renaming it the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. Declaring in his introductory editorial, "Le roy est mort—vive le roy" (25 Feb. 1890), Baum jumped into the Aberdeen newspaper scene with startling verve and all the command of a veteran journalist. He needed it. At the time, Aberdeen had two daily newspapers and at least four other weeklies. Baum, however, had something unique to offer. Edwin C. Torrey, editor of the rival *Aberdeen Weekly News*, would later remark that Baum "displayed surprising ability, not to say genius, in conducting the feature and social departments of his paper."¹⁰

Two aspects of Baum's newspaper stand out as rare and unusual. The first is the editor's genuine interest in the affairs of women, and the second is the inventiveness of his reporting and editorial styles. Baum followed and reported on the politics, prominent personalities, and activities of women with avid attention. His sensitivity to women's political interests came from two directions. His wife, Maud, was the daughter of radical feminist Matilda Joslyn Gage, and 1890 was the year of the first great suffrage campaign in South Dakota. In addition to Baum's mother-in-law, such well-known suffragists as Susan B. Anthony, Anna Howard Shaw, and Carrie Chapman Catt made headlines throughout the state prior to the ballot referendum of November 1890.¹¹ While his in-



FIG. 1. In 1888, L. Frank Baum, a handsome actor and playwright from Syracuse, New York, migrated to Aberdeen, South Dakota. Photograph courtesy of Alexander Mitchell Library, Aberdeen, South Dakota.

terest in suffrage politics is thus understandable, Baum also displays a genuine respect for the nonpolitical activities of women.

Baum quickly noted that church societies provided Aberdeen with its rich social life—its card parties, amateur operettas, socials of many types, teas, formal dinners, choral performances, and hired entertainments. In his second issue, 1 February 1890, Baum began his social reporting with an examination of church groups. "The women," he wrote, "care more for their church ordinarily than the men, for throughout the week they are confined to the quiet routine of a household, while the man leads an active life in the busy outside world." As a result, he suggested, "a woman's recreation in church-going is often a man's boredom, especially when he is not an earnest Christian."¹² Fortunately for the health of Aberdeen's religious organizations, formal church services were not the

only activities that they had to offer. Connected with each denomination were one or more church societies, which were, Baum pointed out, "all societies of women, and all scheming to devise means of extracting in the most agreeable way ducats from the sterner sex to support the church or its institutions. . . . without the expense [to the women] of anything save ingenuity and a little extra exertion."

Adding extra piquancy to Baum's newspaper was his ability to talk out of both sides of his mouth on a given issue. Baum often invented a different voice through which to introduce a critical statement or a gentle satire. Three weeks after the above feature, a purported letter to the editor, suspiciously signed "Dugout" from "Dugout Township, S.D.," reexamined Baum's claim that church socials were accomplished "without expense" to the organizers.¹³ "Our young ladies' sisetty [sic] of the 'Benevolent Bountiful Benefactress,'" the letter read, "has been quite successful. . . . the organization consists of thirteen members and they have succeeded in raising \$27.50 at an actual cost to their parents of only six dollars a member" (22 Feb. 1890).

Likewise, in a regular satirical feature entitled "Our Landlady," Baum often poked fun at the extravagances of these same church socials. In this column, Baum used a consistent persona to express his satire. Sairy Ann Bilkins, a widowed boardinghouse keeper who knew everyone and everything going on in town, expressed her indignation at the "social swirl" of Aberdeen on 1 February 1890. The Gleaners, a young women's service group of the Presbyterian church, were planning a social at which the men in attendance would be required to buy their dinner partners by the pound at auction:

"When I was young," remarked our landlady, picking a gray hair out of the butter and laying it on the edge of the plate to tempt our appetites. "When I was a gal, they didnt [sic] have such goin's on at the church sociables."

"That must have been before my time," said the colonel, ignoring the icy regard of

a scorned woman's eyes turned full upon him.

"To what do you refer, ma'am?" asked Tom unwarily, meaning to avert the coming storm.

"Why to these goin's on about buyin' gals at auction, as if they was so many slaves at the market! It's outrageous, that's what it is, and oughten ter be allowed in a christian country!" (1 Feb. 1890)

Mrs. Bilkins concluded that "girls nowadays is too highy-tighty for anything" before moving on to the next subject.

Baum assumed yet another voice for his report of this same event, which appeared a week later. "And it came to pass," his account began, "that the Gleaners of the Presbyterians gathered at the House of the Apartments, it being the third day of the first week of February. And with them came divers Baptists, Methodists and Episcopalians, together with many scores of unbelievers." Describing the entire auction without losing control of his biblical parody, Baum concluded: "And they said, 'What matters the loss of a few pieces of silver when our hearts are made glad with the smiles of maidens and the soft glances of beauteous eyes? for are they not gleaners in fact as in name, and did we not come expecting to be fleeced? while behold, many have left unto themselves their socks and their eyeglasses, and divers other things which they may carry back to their own homes!'" (8 Feb. 1890).

Baum's focus on social events soon caused comment among his rivals. C. Boyd Barrett, a Virginia native and editor of the *Aberdeen Evening Republican*, deemed it necessary to inform Baum that "personalities, sir, is not journalism, sir!"¹⁴ In fact, Major Barrett found the attention paid to the social milieu of Aberdeen totally objectionable in a time of drought and privation. He commented satirically that ministers could be "glad of one thing . . . that the immigration commissioner in his next report can tell the misinformed people of the east how a Dakota city can bear itself up gaily under the depressing influences of short harvests, dull trade, scanty clothing and scarcity of the necessities of life. How about a charity ball for a

change?"¹⁵ Baum quickly responded to this criticism, saying on 22 February that such "Pecksniffian theology as applied to a daily journal has never yet proved a howling success."

Even though Baum did lavish a great deal of creative attention on social events in the winter of 1890, Barrett's criticism was not really warranted, for Baum did not neglect other concerns of the day. While he cannot be considered a serious reporter (boiler plate supplied much of his state and national news), he did take seriously his responsibility to editorialize, producing two distinct types of regular editorials and a smattering of satirical poems and vignettes that added to the many voices he used throughout his eight- to twelve-page weekly. His main type of editorial was one in which he, as editor, commented on local, state, and (occasionally) national politics and issues. Most of Baum's editorials on woman suffrage were of this type, as were his editorials on politics, prohibition, and irrigation.

In his other consistent type of editorial, Baum employed an urbane and relaxed tone in which he discussed topics of a more universal and less topical or timely nature. These editorials appeared under the heading "The Editor's Musings," and they originally covered a range of topics that included religion, tolerance, occultism, western women, and miserliness. These columns, however, must have sparked some unpleasant criticism because they disappeared after a short time, and when they again appeared five months later, they carried this caveat: "When I admit you into this, my inner sanctum, it is in confidence, as your humble friend, and you must not criticize me. I take this opportunity to have a quiet chat with you, and you can't dispute me. This is not the newspaper, it's the man, and if you don't like him you are not obliged to read what he says" (18 Oct. 1890).¹⁶ After this point, the musings follow a pattern only somewhat evident earlier and focus on the "unchurched" and spiritualism.

Within these two types of editorials, many of the ideas and themes that can be seen in Baum's later fiction manifest themselves. Baum regularly encouraged his readers to vote Repub-

lican. "It is the poor man's ticket," he urged on 12 April 1890, "the merchant's and mechanic's ticket, the taxpayer's ticket,—everybody's ticket." A week later, on 19 April, he announced a Republican victory in the local election with a poem that read in part:

The mugwumps all before us fell
And democratic sighs do heave.
The "People's Ticket" has gone to—well
All that remains is a "ticket of leave."

By fall, however, local and state politics had become infinitely more complex. On 6 June 1890, the Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor joined disaffected Republicans and Democrats to form a third party, which that summer was called the Independent party but would soon be labeled the Populist party.¹⁷

Editor Baum took a tolerant view of the Independents, reminding his more strident fellow editors on 18 October 1890 that the third-party members were "not devils incarnate." Instead, he suggested, "they are our friends and brothers, honorable and good men, who are just now in a fit of the sulks because they feel aggrieved about something and want us to understand that they are aggrieved."¹⁸ He encouraged the Independents, whom he regarded primarily as fallen-away Republicans, to remember that the GOP was their "old man" and that all were "members of one great family," the Republican party, which "saved the Union" and "stands today as the emblem of prosperity among nations." Because brothers do not quarrel permanently, Baum did not intend to brand the erring Independents "as scoundrels" and "shoot arrows of hatred so deeply into their hearts that eternity could not heal the wound. The time is coming when again we shall live in harmony" (18 Oct. 1890).

In plugging Baum's politics into interpretive readings of his *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, some critics have mistakenly assumed that Baum was a Democrat, while others have correctly identified him as a traditional Republican. Those who identify him as a Democrat cannot be blamed for their confusion, however, since

members of his own family have made the same mistake. Baum rarely revealed his politics, and family tradition has him speaking for opposing candidates in the same election in the mid-1890s.¹⁹ Indeed, there are even moments in the *Pioneer* when Baum's Republicanism seems opportunistic rather than deeply held. He remarked at one point: "Aberdeen, a republican city in a republican and prohibition State, is bound to have the grandest boom in the near future that it has ever experienced" (19 Apr. 1890). The reader comes to suspect that Baum's *Pioneer* was carefully positioned to be both Republican and prohibitionist in order to partake in the boom. Baum's temperance leanings were gradually revealed to be conformist rather than ideological, and Baum was doing everything he could to attract patronage and build his weekly into "the largest newspaper in South Dakota" (3 May 1890).²⁰

Whatever the strength of Baum's commitment to the Republican party, it was severely shaken as he watched the graft and fraud employed at the polls in November 1890. The Independents, who did not sink to illegal behavior, won a majority of the local (but not state) contests. Baum therefore concluded: "If the independents can be instrumental in any way in purifying the ballot; if through them the party rings and heelers and paid workers shall stand rebuked, we shall hail their advent with pleasure." Even though the Independents had displayed an admirable lack of corruption, they did not instill Baum with much confidence. He considered them idealists who, "judged from an unbiased standpoint, . . . are seeking to rectify some evils which have never existed, and to counterbalance others which are existent with those no less to be condemned and avoided. They lack the experience and ability to reconstruct the debased politics of this country" (8 Nov. 1890).

The group that Baum considered capable of revitalizing American politics was women, and he supported the cause of woman suffrage at every opportunity. He added it, for instance, as

the kicker to his early editorial musings on tolerance, concluding: "Still, we have one more lesson in tolerance to learn. We must do away with sex prejudice and render equal distinction and reward to brains and ability, no matter whether found in man or woman" (1 Feb. 1890). Responding to letters to the editor and rival editorials on the subject, Baum frequently took newspapers throughout the state to task for "antiquated objections which have been urged for centuries, almost, against woman suffrage" (12 Apr. 1890). Devoting three columns to a refutation of the arguments of the *Sioux Falls Daily Press*, Baum declared on 26 April 1890 that the "vile element who control politics" could not "drag women to their own level, and they will slink away and leave the field clear to a reformation in politics. It is this very thing that we look forward to; for if our politics are to be masculine forever I despair of the republic."

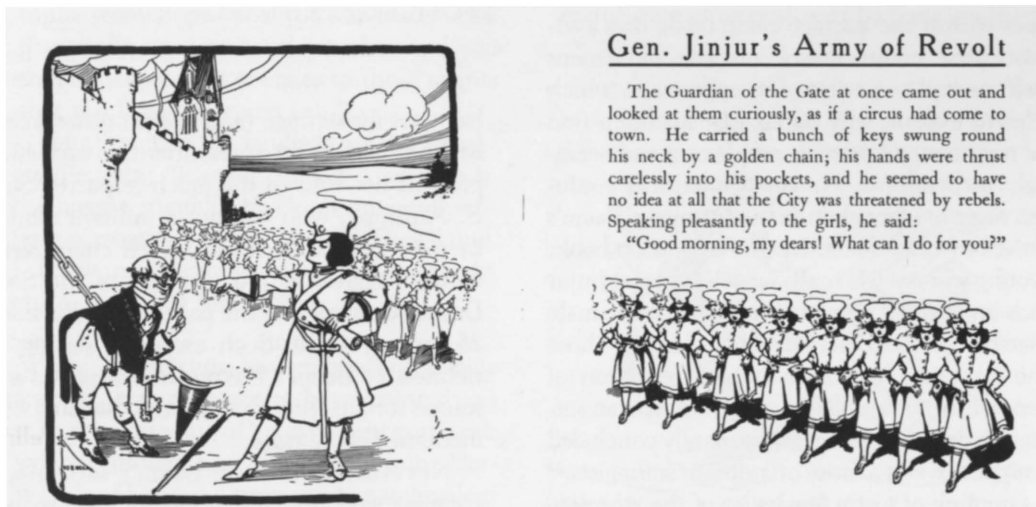
In spite of the strength of his support for suffrage, Baum's sense of humor sometimes diminished his effectiveness. Often he simply could not resist an opportunity to twit his fellow townsmen on the suffrage issue. For a Presbyterian Ball in early April, the Gleaners organized an event in which the men sewed rag scraps into "balls" (a play on words since the Presbyterians did not believe in dancing). One man, O. K. Pellman, did so well that Baum, who never forgot his editorial issues while writing of other things, could not keep himself from alluding to the fears of South Dakota men regarding the ramifications of suffrage. In his report of the event, he remarked that the young women of Aberdeen would propose to Pellman during leap year, "believing that his wife can go out and talk politics and leave him at home to mend the children's socks." He reported that the guests repaired to supper "after this test of womanly manhood" (12 Apr. 1890).

Baum's humor was at its most devilish when he played with the male insecurities that surfaced often during the 1890 suffrage campaign. The fear that women's participation in government would result in forced role reversal found

vulgar expression in the phrase "when women vote men must suckle the babies." Injudiciously uttered by one of the Democratic candidates at the state party convention, the remark cost the man his nomination, but it accurately reflected a prevalent concern of those opposed to woman suffrage.²¹ Baum himself scoffed at these fears, stating on 19 April 1890 that "without one exception," the suffragists were "charming, womanly women, of sufficient character and intelligence to do their duty to their family and themselves at the same time." Two paragraphs later, however, he could not resist overstating his case, warning the already apprehensive men that women were so superior that when they got the vote, "from that time forward the male population must look carefully to its laurels."

All the same, Baum truly appeared to believe that when women became involved in government, they would dictate "a pure and just political policy that will be impossible to refute and difficult to improve upon" (19 Apr. 1890). It was this female utopia that Baum set up in his Oz books, where the rightful rulers are all women.²²

In the real life of 1890, as in Oz, however, the female realm was not without factions and discordant personalities, and it is important to note that while Baum's fictional rulers are female so are his petty bureaucrats and other villains. Baum, as the secretary of the local Aberdeen suffragist organization, had firsthand experience with the infighting that took place in the 1890 South Dakota suffrage campaign.



The boy followed after them, carrying several baskets and wraps and packages which various members of the Army of Revolt had placed in his care. It was not long before they came to the green granite walls of the City and halted before the gateway.

90

Gen. Jinjur's Army of Revolt

The Guardian of the Gate at once came out and looked at them curiously, as if a circus had come to town. He carried a bunch of keys swung round his neck by a golden chain; his hands were thrust carelessly into his pockets, and he seemed to have no idea at all that the City was threatened by rebels. Speaking pleasantly to the girls, he said:

"Good morning, my dears! What can I do for you?"



"Surrender instantly!" answered General Jinjur, standing before him and frowning as terribly as her pretty face would allow her to.

"Surrender!" echoed the man, astounded. "Why, it's impossible. It's against the law! I never heard of such a thing in my life."

91

FIG. 2. Drawn by John R. Neill, General Jinjur's Army of Revolt marched across the pages of Baum's *Marvelous Land of Oz*. Photo courtesy of William Morrow, Books of Wonder 1985 facsimile reprint of *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1904).

In addition, many of the national and state suffrage speakers who passed through South Dakota that year stayed overnight or spent a day with the Baums. Often these personalities were not getting along with one another. Matilda Joslyn Gage and Susan B. Anthony, who both spent time in the Baum home that year, were carrying on a heated public disagreement over Gage's formation of the radical Women's National Liberal Union, an antichurch group. Baum's editorials on Anthony and his mother-in-law (1 March 1890) or on Anthony and her various conflicts with state suffrage workers (3 May 1890, for example) were remarkably even-handed. While he could often be seen to favor one person or point of view over another, his loyalty was rarely blind. When he saw the suffragists make decisions that hurt their cause, he was quick to criticize one or all of them and subject them to satire ("Our Landlady," 18 Oct. 1890, for instance).²³

Baum's awareness of the differing philosophies within the suffrage camp made him a sophisticated commentator on the movement itself, as well as a critic of its opposition, which helps to explain why Baum scholars often find his treatment of women perplexing and seemingly inconsistent. Nowhere is critical confusion more evident than in discussions of Baum's *Marvelous Land of Oz*. In this second Oz book, a young woman who calls herself General Jinjur leads an army of girls in revolt against the male rulership of the Emerald City. Many of those who have studied Baum's characterization of General Jinjur and his treatment of woman suffrage in this book have unfortunately concluded that the novel is a satire on militant suffragists.²⁴ A sampling of just a few issues of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, however, suggests other possibilities. When ridiculing public figures for their conceits, Baum treated all individuals equally, whether they were male or female. Quite likely, when Baum created General Jinjur he intended to comment on strident suffragists who liked to posture, such as South Dakotan Marietta Bones who "moved majestically across the floor with a suggestion of dash in every step" and waged



GENERAL JINJUR AND HER ARMY CAPTURE THE CITY.

FIG. 3. *General Jinjur and her army capture the Emerald City*. Photo courtesy of William Morrow, Books of Wonder 1985 facsimile reprint of *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1904).

her wars for suffrage (and against other suffragists) primarily for the press attention such efforts brought her.²⁵ Even the much respected Susan B. Anthony, who was not a militant feminist by most standards, found herself characterized as the "aggressive old general" of the South Dakota campaign in the pages of the *Pioneer* on 25 January 1890. Such examples suggest the richness of Baum's Dakota newspaper as a resource for studying the author's fictional commentaries on suffrage.

Nevertheless, while Baum's satires were complex and his sympathies for women were sincere, Baum was still a man of his times, and he frequently fell into easy stereotypes when portraying women in either fact or fiction. In his *Marvelous Land of Oz*, this propensity manifested itself in his characterization of General Jinjur who usurps the throne of the Emerald City of Oz for the good reason that, as she says, it "has been ruled by men long enough." It quickly becomes evident, however, that Jinjur's

hidden motivation is a “feminine” lust for the jewels that are abundant in the city streets.²⁶

In the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, this duality in Baum’s treatment of women is most obvious in his satirical column “Our Landlady,” in which Sairy Ann Bilkins embodies many unappealing stereotypes of the scheming, gossiping woman. At the same time, it is this persona that makes some of Baum’s most effective comments on suffrage. As an example, consider his 15 March 1890 column in which the landlady has decided to run for mayor, and her boarders, all three of whom are male, are urging her to give up her ambitions:

“My dear Mrs. Bilkins,” remarked the doctor, “Tom is right. In a certain sense we are your family, and a woman of family should not meddle in public affairs.”

“Hm!” said the landlady.

“Your kind heart,” said the colonel, “leads you to meddle in affairs that should be left to the sterner sex. Now you’re a better cook than politician, or anything else, and you should devote your energies to those talents that the Lord has given you.”

“Hm!” sniffed the landlady, as the boarders filed out; “it’s the conceit o’ men as is the biggest stumblin block ter universal sufferin o’ women! But let ‘em talk. They’ll find I know my business—yes, an’ everybody else’s, too!” (15 Mar. 1890)

While Baum thus has ambivalent female characters, many observers have pointed out that he resolves some of his divergent portrayals of women through his creation of heroine Dorothy Gale of Kansas, a strong and unambivalent character who destroys the Wicked Witch and frees Oz of tyranny. Critic Brian Attebery has noted that Dorothy is a westerner and that she represents “the quasi-mythic conception of frontier womanhood.”²⁷ In fact, the whole critical reading of the *Wizard of Oz* as a populist-sympathizing, regionally-based fairy tale revolves around an understanding of Dorothy’s western assertiveness and know-how (which

even extends to her ability to conquer the drought and other natural forces that attacked the West as personified in the Wicked Witch).²⁸ One wonders, then, how conscious Baum was of his heroine’s westernness. In this instance, the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* provides good evidence that Baum had strong opinions about the relative merits of eastern and western women and that he knew exactly what he was doing with Dorothy.

In his “Editor’s Musings” column of 15 March 1890, Baum compared two types of women. Those of the East, he claimed, “sit with idly folded arms or listlessly dallying with fancy work” while their husbands and fathers slave to make ends meet. The western woman, in contrast, “delights in being useful,” and her “highest ambition is to become a bread-winner.” Indeed, in Aberdeen, he asserted, there was not one young girl or married woman “who in one way or another is not engaged in some useful and helpful occupation.” The reason for this wonderful state of affairs could be found in the fact



FIG. 4. In a drawing for the first edition of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, illustrator William W. Denslow captured Dorothy in the act of melting the Wicked Witch with a pail of water. Photograph from the 1956 Reilly & Lee reprint of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1900).

that "western women have more energy and vitality than those of the east" and because "there is no nonsense or false pride in their constitutions and they cannot brook idleness when they see [work] before them." Eastern women, Baum went on to say, "simply want to be let alone, to sit in their parlors, wear fine clothes, read cheap literature, talk nonsense and be figureheads in 'society.'" It should be no surprise, therefore, to learn that General Jinjur, the bonbon-eating and jewel-grasping girl who threatens the peace of Oz, is an eastern woman.²⁹

Another instance in which one can almost see Baum's fictional themes leap off the pages of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* concerns the imagery surrounding the drought and the Wicked Witch of the West. Henry M. Littlefield appears to have been the first Baum scholar to note that the western witch represented "Baum's version of sentient and malign nature." He continues: "Dorothy destroys the evil Witch by angrily dousing her with a bucket of water. Water, that precious commodity which the drought-ridden farmers on the great plains needed so badly, and which if correctly used could create an agricultural paradise, or at least dissolve a wicked witch. Plain water brings an end to malign nature in the West." A cursory perusal of the *Pioneer* leaves no doubt that Baum believed strongly, almost mystically, in irrigation as the salvation of Dakota farmers.³⁰ A closer reading unearths this gem from the 29 March 1890 issue. After noting that "the weather prophets" have predicted a wet spring, Baum declares: "The farmer who, with a rainy season before him, wont [sic] subscribe for the PIONEER, must be wetted down until, like the ducked witches of years ago, he cries for mercy."³¹

Of course, the prophets proved false, and the rains did not come. On 5 November 1890, the local Independents defeated the local Republicans at the polls, and Baum lost hope of strong political patronage for his newspaper. The woman suffrage referendum failed as well. After the election, both speculators and longtime settlers began to abandon the state as local banks failed along with the crops. Baum's optimism about opportunities in the West could not sur-

vive. While he continued to boom South Dakota, his editorials and satires began to change. His local editorials became detached and uninspired, but in contrast, his "Our Landlady" columns moved away from satire into fantasy. From 27 December 1890 to 8 February 1891, this column gives an unparalleled opportunity to examine various influences on and patterns in Baum's fantasy writings.

Baum created his most spectacular fantasy for the 3 January 1891 issue. Here, Mrs. Bilkins "Visits the Great Downtitch Farm and Tells the Boarders of Its Wonders." The immediate inspiration for this column came from two articles that had appeared in the rival *Aberdeen Daily News* on 16 and 30 December 1890. In the first, entitled "The Wonderful Updyke Farm," the editor of the *News* created a promotional daydream in which the James River Valley of the Dakotas had become a fertile and booming paradise because of irrigation. The Updyke farm, a prototype of this future, was a modern marvel where lights and heat on the farm were run by electricity supplied through an artesian well drilled for irrigation purposes. This fantasy world, elaborately detailed in the *News*, probably owed its inspiration to Edward Bellamy's popular utopian fantasy *Looking Backward* (1888), but the use of artesian wells for both irrigation and electricity (via a water-wheel) appears to have been something South Dakota promoters were hoping to demonstrate in a scale-model exhibit for the 1892 (postponed to 1893) World's Columbian Exposition.³²

In Baum's hands, however, the material became something else—something that bears his distinctive trademarks and displays his ability to take American scenery, concepts, desires, and themes and turn them into humorous American fairy tales. Edward Wagenknecht in *Utopia Americana* (1929) was the first to point out that Baum's fairyland of Oz was uniquely American and to note that Baum's "fancy plays about and transforms not things that he has seen but things he has read about."³³ This transformation is exactly what is taking place in Baum's "Our Landlady" column, where farmer Updyke

becomes Downtitch, who once employed the "inferior" Updyke. While Updyke's use of electricity had practical agricultural applications (farmers could plant, cultivate, and harvest electrically), Downtitch's use of electricity recalls some of Baum's later inventions, such as the Tik-Tok Man of Oz. Downtitch not only lighted his house and worked his fields with the help of electricity, he also shrugged his shoulders and smiled "by 'lectricity" (3 Jan. 1890).

In their concentration on fantasy and the future, Baum's last "Our Landlady" columns foreshadowed his imminent withdrawal from the harsh realities of South Dakota. Early in 1891, the editor began to have health problems, and the *Pioneer* often carried a notice that asked readers to excuse its deficiencies since Baum was either ill or out of town.³⁴ The "Our Landlady" column ceased to appear after 8 February, and throughout both February and March, the *Pioneer* resembled its contemporaries, showing little of the sparkle and humor that had earlier made it unique. On 4 April, Baum's friendliest rival, the *Aberdeen Daily News*, carried a notice that, by that time, surprised no one. Editor Baum had taken a position elsewhere and would retire from the *Pioneer*, returning the plant to John Drake. Baum would be working for "one of the leading dailies in Chicago, where, if the work is somewhat arduous, it is all along one line and is devoid to a large extent of worry and anxiety."

Baum spent only a few months working for the *Chicago Evening Post* before becoming a department store clerk and then, in 1893, a traveling salesman for a chinaware company. In 1897, he began to edit a magazine for window dressers and to write and publish children's books, beginning with *Mother Goose in Prose*. Three years later, his Chicago publisher, the George M. Hill Company, took a chance and lent its name to his masterpiece, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. From 1900 until his death in 1919, Baum wrote thirteen more Oz books and more than fifty other novels, using as many as seven pseudonyms.³⁵ By the end of 1891, then, the short period in the author's life when he had both reason and inclination to ruminate in

prose on the meaning of woman suffrage or the desirability of political honesty was over. These themes would still figure heavily in his writing for the rest of his life, but they were now the background ideas and values against which his fictional figures played out their lives.

Years after he had left Aberdeen, Baum would write: "I often look back on my Dakota experiences with mingled sighs and smiles. Hardships that seemed very real then have been hallowed by time, and I am glad now to have had that phase of life."³⁶ Considering the importance of that period of his life to his formation and *our* understanding of Oz, that most enduring of all American fairylands, millions of readers can also be glad that Baum had that western phase of his life.

NOTES

1. L. Frank Baum to T. Clarkson Gage, 30 July 1888, L. Frank Baum Collection, Alexander Mitchell Library, Aberdeen, S.Dak.

2. Henry M. Littlefield, "The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," *American Quarterly* 16 (Spring 1964): 47-58; Fred Erisman, "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma," *American Quarterly* 20 (Fall 1968): 616-23; Brian Attebery, "Oz," in *The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum, ed. Michael Patrick Hearn, the Critical Heritage Series (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p. 295.

3. Baum had edited a newspaper in Bradford, Pennsylvania, when he was a teenager, but it consisted primarily of boiler plate. In 1880, he had established the *Poultry Record* in Syracuse to promote the raising of fancy chickens, and later, from 1897 to 1902, he would also publish a Chicago-based trade magazine, the *Show Window*, for window dressers. Beyond these specialized endeavors, however, Baum's adult output was primarily fiction, and he produced more than seventy books in his lifetime. See Michael Patrick Hearn, "L. Frank Baum: Chicken Fancier," *Baum Bugle* 30 (Autumn 1986): 24, and Frank Joslyn Baum and Russell P. MacFall, *To Please a Child: A Biography of L. Frank Baum, Royal Historian of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co., 1961), pp. 33, 93-96.

4. Baum to Gage, 30 July 1888. See also Baum to Gage, 8 June 1888, Baum Collection.

5. Michael Patrick Hearn, "L. Frank Baum: Amateur Printer," *Baum Bugle* 30 (Spring 1986): 11-18; Hearn, "L. Frank Baum: Chicken Fancier," pp. 23-24; Martin Gardner, "The Royal Historian of Oz," in *The Wizard of Oz & Who He Was*, by Martin Gardner and Russel B. Nye (East Lansing: Michigan

State University Press, 1957), pp. 20-21; Robert S. Baum, "The Autobiography of Robert Stanton Baum, Part 1," *Baum Bugle* 14 (Christmas 1970): 17; Baum to Gage, 30 July 1888.

6. Matilda Jewell Gage, "The Dakota Days of L. Frank Baum, Part 1," *Baum Bugle* 10 (Spring 1966): 5-8; Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 189-90.

7. Baum to Gage, 30 July 1888; Matilda Jewell Gage, "Dakota Days, Part 1," pp. 6-8; Edwin C. Torrey, *Early Days in Dakota* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Farnham Printing & Stationery Co., 1925), p. 78.

8. Helen L. Gage, "L. Frank Baum: An Inside Introduction to the Public," *Dakotan* 5 (Jan., Feb., Mar. 1903): 269. Helen Gage reduced the stock of the store, renamed it Gage's Bazaar, and ran it with moderate success for twelve years. Matilda Jewell Gage, "Dakota Days, Part 1," p. 8.

9. *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 8 Feb. 1890. Dates of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* will hereafter be given in parentheses in the text.

10. Torrey, *Early Days in Dakota*, p. 78. The daily newspapers were the *Aberdeen Daily News* and the *Aberdeen Evening Republican*. The weeklies included the *Aberdeen Weekly News*, the *Weekly Republican*, the *Aberdeen Appeal*, a Women's Christian Temperance Union paper, and the *Dakota Ruralist*, a Farmers' Alliance paper. In addition, newspapers of nearby towns, such as the *Warner Sun*, circulated widely in Aberdeen, while other enterprises, notably the *State Democrat*, started up late in the year.

11. The South Dakota suffrage campaign is explored in Cecelia M. Wittmayer, "The 1889-1890 Woman Suffrage Campaign: A Need to Organize," *South Dakota History* 11 (Summer 1981): 199-225, and Dennis A. Norlin, "The Suffrage Movement and South Dakota Churches: Radicals and the Status Quo, 1890," *South Dakota History* 14 (Winter 1984): 308-34.

12. Baum undoubtedly spoke from personal experience, and most of his biographers have remarked that throughout his life his interest in traditional religion appeared to be limited. Instead, Baum showed an enthusiasm for the more unorthodox spiritual movements and ideas of the day. See his *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* editorials on Theosophy (25 Jan. 1890), occultism (22 Feb. 1890), clairvoyance (5 April 1890), and spiritualism (6 Dec. 1890).

13. In the early issues of the newspaper, Baum signed many of his satirical features or columns with fictitious names. His first three "Our Landlady" columns, for instance, carried "Pete" as a by-line. As time went on, he discontinued this practice. It is also interesting to note that Baum signed at least one *Pioneer* poem with his playwrighting pen name, Louis

F. Baum. See "Nance Adkins" in the 1 Mar. 1890 *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*.

14. Quoted in *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 1 Mar. 1890.

15. *Aberdeen Evening Republican*, 15 Feb. 1890.

16. These columns appeared in each issue from 25 January to 22 February 1890, then once a month through May 1890. After that, they were discontinued until 18 October 1890.

17. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 3d ed., rev. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), pp. 224-29. Schell suggests that South Dakota "may be regarded as the birthplace of the Populist party since it was the first state in which it became an independent political organization" (pp. 227-28).

18. An assessment of the grievances that led to the formation of a third party can be found in Larry Remele, "'God Helps Those Who Help Themselves': The Farmers Alliance and Dakota Statehood," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 37 (Autumn 1987): 22-33.

19. Gardner, "Royal Historian of Oz," p. 29, and Littlefield, "Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," both identify Baum as a Democrat. Erisman, "L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma," notes his "lifelong Republicanism" (p. 617 n.3). Helen L. Gage, who reported in "L. Frank Baum: An Inside Introduction" that her brother-in-law "has always been a Democrat" (p. 269), apparently failed to read the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*. In the same article, Gage recorded what appears to be the earliest published version of the family anecdote about Baum's ability to adjust his political rhetoric to any occasion. Another version appears in Harry Neal Baum, "My Father Was the 'Wizard of Oz': Memories and Anecdotes of a Famous Father," *Baum Bugle* 29 (Autumn 1985): 8.

20. After consistently promoting prohibition in editorials (see the 8 Mar. 1890 issue, for example) prior to its effective date of 1 May 1890, Baum admits on the third of May that he did not believe in it because he failed to see how it could be enforced without hurting the business climate of South Dakota. The reader had already surmised, however, that his heart was not in the temperance cause because of his 22 March 1890 "Our Landlady" column in which he commented humorously on the problems prohibition posed for doctors, druggists, and grocers. Baum nevertheless urged rigorous enforcement of the new law "in order that we may judge its qualities and effects" (3 May 1890). Baum had serious aspirations for his newspaper, intending to make it "as readable as any St. Paul or Chicago Sunday paper" in the hopes that subscribers could be induced to substitute it for the metropolitan papers (3 May 1890). However, as William H. Lyon, "The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier," *Journal of*

the West 19 (Apr. 1980), has observed, newspapers on the frontier were not really moneymaking ventures and political patronage and public printing were essential to their survival (p. 12). Like most western editors, Baum was enough of a realist to position his paper to his best political advantage without gain-saying his own political philosophy.

21. Candidate E. W. Miller was quoted in *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 14 June 1890. Norlin, "Suffrage Movement and South Dakota Churches," pp. 309-31, gives a good summary of male concerns and arguments concerning the potential effects of woman suffrage. Baum himself specifically refers to and attempts to defuse many of these same arguments in a *Pioneer* editorial on 21 June 1890.

22. Readers will recall that it is Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, who resolves the problems at the end of both the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the *Marvelous Land of Oz*. At the end of the latter novel also, the true monarch of Oz, Princess Ozma, is revealed and reigns from that point onward throughout the twelve additional novels in the original series. For discussions of Baum's female rulers and the feminine nature of Oz as a utopia, see Raylyn Moore, *Wonderful Wizard, Marvelous Land* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1974), pp. 130-50; Russel B. Nye, "An Appreciation," in *The Wizard of Oz & Who He Was*, pp. 10-13; Carl S. Vogel, "The Amazonia of Oz," *Baum Bugle* 26 (Autumn 1982): 4-8; and especially Robert B. Luehrs, "L. Frank Baum and the Land of Oz: A Children's Author as Social Critic," *Nineteenth Century* 6 (Autumn 1980): 55-57.

23. *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 1 Mar., 19 Apr., 10 May 1890; Norlin, "Suffrage Movement and South Dakota Churches," pp. 310, 331-34.

24. See, for example, Vogel, "Amazonia of Oz," pp. 7-8. At the end of the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Scarecrow was the ruler. In the *Marvelous Land of Oz*, after General Jinjur usurps his throne, he and the Tin Woodman team up with an enchanted young boy named Tip, who had run away from Mombi, the witch and villain of the book. With an incredible cast of new characters, including Jack Pumpkinhead, the Saw-Horse, the Gump, and Mr. H. M. Woggle-Bug, T. E., they have a series of adventures before Glinda the Good and her army of women liberate the Emerald City. In the denouement of the book, Glinda forces Mombi to remove the enchantment from Tip, revealing that he is actually a girl named Ozma and the rightful ruler of Oz. The ending alone seems to suggest that Baum had more in mind than a satire on militant feminists. It is also instructive to note that the *Marvelous Land of Oz* contains two girl armies. General Jinjur's army carries knitting needles, and, while it scares a lot of people, it more or less surrenders without a fight when it meets real competition. Glinda's army, on the other hand, carries

lances and swords and is a force to be reckoned with, even though its shields are edged with peacock feathers.

25. *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 22 Mar. 1890. See also Baum's 1 Mar. and 3 May 1890 articles on Marietta Bones. It has already been remarked (see note included with L. Frank Baum, "She Manufactures Hash and Gives the Boarders a Few Pointers on the Aberdeen Guards," *Baum Bugle* 28 [Autumn 1984]: 13-14) that Baum may have used a South Dakota drill team, the Aberdeen Guard, as a model for his girl armies. He reports on the activities of this young women's organization in the 24 May and 7 June 1890 issues of the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* and, in his usual fashion, also pokes fun at their efforts in an "Our Landlady" column on 31 May.

26. Baum, *The Land of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co., 1904), quotation p. 80, pp. 81, 91. After the first edition, *Marvelous* was dropped from the title.

27. Attebery, "Oz," p. 295. He goes on to say that in this guise Dorothy "reveals Baum's regional-minded optimism: what wonderful children we are raising in the West, he is saying; they are the hope of the country."

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 282-86; Littlefield, "Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," pp. 52-53, 55.

29. General Jinjur and the girls in her Army of Revolt wear uniforms that indicate their country of origin (*Land of Oz*, p. 82). The blue of Jinjur's top button and front skirt panel proclaims her to be a Munchkin (pp. 77-78), and in Baum's Oz, Brian Attebery has noted, the land of the Munchkins is "the settled East" ("Oz," p. 285). Attebery also points out that Baum's portrayal of young people is regionally consistent and that he has little faith in those from the East (p. 295).

30. Littlefield, "Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism," pp. 55-56; see Baum's editorials on 25 Jan., 2 Aug., 4, 11, 25 Oct. 1890 and 7 Mar. 1891.

31. Michael Patrick Hearn suggested in *The Annotated Wizard of Oz* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1973), p. 234, that Baum was alluding to the historical connection between water and witches in his *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, where the witch always carried an umbrella and could be destroyed by water.

32. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 30 Dec. 1890.

33. Edward Wagenknecht, *Utopia Americana* (Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1929), reprinted in *Wizard of Oz*, Critical Heritage Series, p. 148.

34. See *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, 28 Feb., 7, 21 Mar. 1891. Baum had a tumor removed from under his tongue in early March.

35. For information about Baum's life in Chicago and his later life and work, see Baum and MacFall, *To Please a Child*, pp. 76-275.

36. Quoted in Torrey, *Early Days in Dakota*, p. 178.