8. Oz

The Wizard comes from sideshows in the Midwest, works old tricks with stereoptic projectors, circa 1800—still vaguely remembered by 1938. (The Wizard has reinvented Robertson's Phantasmagoria, but no one remembers magic lanterns in Oz, not even in Kansas.) The kingdom of Oz, where he governs, is a walled city-state, modeled on a Baroque city (circa 1750); but its specialty, like a Hanseatic state updated, is industrial tool and dye. Along with master metalworkers, the optics awry is very advanced, the colors riper than nature. Specialists can retool the tin man. A makeup expert like Max Factor sets Dorothy's hair and complexion.

Essentially, *Oz*—the movie—is modeled on a movie studio with a gated entrance, like MGM in Culver City. It is Los Angeles south of the orchards of the San Fernando Valley (where Gable had a ranch). Or further north past the "Grapevine" (above LA. County), into the boonies toward Bakersfield; or northeast of the city into the capital of Sunkist orange growing, past the old citrus town of Fillmore. Perhaps the munchkins live somewhere near the Ventura County line, working in an imaginary Spanish mission, like the characters in Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* (1884).

Kansas is Kansas/ L.A., the vast midwestern influence throughout Southern California by 1938—"Iowa West," as some old-timers used to call it. Kansas was not Oz enough, too much dust bowl; L.A. was closer to Kansas, more verdant, along the newly developed Route 66. Of course, the Kansas/L.A. of Oz started in the teens. L. Frank Baum, the author of the Oz books, already had identified Emerald City as Los Angeles in 1910. He moved to L.A. from Chicago, tried his hand at "photoplays," and died in Hollywood in 1919 (even before it was identified with movies, when it was called "Orchard Avenue," the boundary of farms essentially).

Like many "easterners" before him, he settled in the sanitizing climate of Southern California for his health (weak heart). He called his estate Ozcot,

and became a prize-winning horticulturalist. Hollywood was Winkle country—rustic— with chaparral, compared to the dingy train station and the new banks downtown. (Spring Street downtown was known as "Wall Street West" and so on). During the teens, Hollywood was very Midwest in its morals, a dry town before Prohibition. The orchards practically crept to the foothills. Though feature-length movies were shot there from 1913 onward (cheap open land), the film business would not claim Hollywood as its brand until 1922. Baum had been a rather quixotic entrepreneur his entire life anyway. Failing to make *Oz* films profitable was merely in character. By 1916, he lost interest in the movies. Anyway, the patchwork quilt of little movie businesses was primarily miles east of where he lived, closer to downtown (what is now Echo Park).

So we can make only so much out of L.A. as Emerald City: It wasn't the L.A. that tourists who come in tend to imagine; it was farm country. Thus we try another tact: Something else strikes me even more than L.A. as a boosterist extension of Kansas City and Iowa back in 1916 (by way of the Santa Fe Railroad that started the great real estate boom of 1885, and filled the city with midwesterners).

What interests me more, as part of special effects, is how Baum misread the Baroque tradition as Oz, the fairyland[1] as special effects; and that somehow "gilded-age Baroque" was already a primitive link to L.A. He morphs Baroque theatrical and mercantile engines with industrial machines. He blends the early-modern guild with the hand-tooled stage of industrial capitalism, before Ford's assembly line, when imperialism first encourages warring plutocrats to become the steel and oil lords of the earth. As another version of the Baroque Imaginary, gilded-age American know-how was often mixed with pure "bushwa." Instead of stories about Victor Frankensteins, they centered more on Horatio Algers, on entrepreneurs climbing up by their bootstraps. It was the era of "Edisonades," pulp boys' fiction about quirky scientists using their gumption to go ballooning into adventures, like Garrett Servis's *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898), a serialized story for boys that answered H.G. Wells' gloomier *War of the Worlds* (1897). From the French came a more introverted Decadent Baroque Imaginary version of Edison: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve Future* (1886). Here we meet Edison as "the marvelous inventor of so many illusions." He is the (deaf, Beethoven-like) "magician of ear." We first encounter Edison as a weary natural aristocrat, in his dressing gown, in no particular hurry, time to muse. His laboratory is a clutter of magical retorts and gizmos, for "a Genie of the Ring in the Arabian Nights."[2] This was hardly the Baroque Imaginary that Baum invents. His land has its gloomy margins, its

professional con men, its cons and pros. There is surely a distress call about fast-talking Midwest capitalism. But his Oz books are mostly an Edisonade, a paean to quirky entrepreneurs like Tesla and Edison, and the new American cities they were illuminating.

Baum splits off American industrialism in two directions. Amidst the kingdom of Oz, industrial marvels are diminished by carny nightmares (in a land of freaks and wonders). But these wonders suggest factories. The Emerald City itself centers around more undiluted hoopla. It clearly resembles an amusement park (or a world's fair) more than a movie studio. Every major city added an amusement park during the 1890s or soon after, in the years of the Oz books. In fact, Dorothy rides in by a cyclone (the famous roller coaster at Coney Island was called the Cyclone).

L.A. had three amusement park zones: Ocean Park, Venice, and the Santa Monica Pier, probably larger overall than Coney Island itself. Very likely Baum himself visited the piers (Lick Pier, Million Dollar Pier), and the various magical points of entry, from lagoons to canals to beach house fantasies. By 1925, Venice joins the city of Los Angeles, and is promptly punished for its carnal excess, forced to observe Sunday blue laws, and to rebuild the piers that had burned down. The culture of entertainment and theming still seemed immoral.

When Dorothy enters the Emerald City, she is given green spectacles, like Comenius's pilgrim.[3] They turn the city into illusion, a labyrinth of the world. It glows like radium, a very ambivalent and mystically scientific green (as if from a Baroque occult laboratory)—green as poisoned ground, or as fresh as new crops.[4] It was another bit of hokum by the wizard, an admitted "humbug." A circus con man, his balloon had blown off-course into Oz, where, like Cortés, he was anointed a wizard. But he shows Dorothy and her friends how he fooled Oz by tricking paper, wire, animal skins, a ball of cotton.[5] He needed cover once he learned that witches nearby possessed real magic (true "faerie," the preindustrial world of magic that Tolkien exploits decades later). The wizard feigns mystery; hides behind his dressing screen, inside his circus tricks.

The Wizard is trapped in the wrong century; a fin de siècle illusionist in faerie Europe, like the author of the Oz books himself. Baum invented a fairyland as techno-collage. First he borrowed heavily from the Victorian versions of seventeenth-century fantasy, as reconstituted by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. He typically misremembers the three hundred tiny German duchies of early modern Germany as quaint, not hammered by the Thirty Years' War (yet war is very much in the air at Oz). His kingdoms clearly (but oddly) resemble those of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Holy Roman Empire, with

armies of eighteen soldiers (Oogaboo),[6] with mad recapitulations of the Thirty Years' War, but thrice removed, as received by way of children's literature in America, by way of England, France, and Germany.

Baum also made a sounding—faintly—of old Baroque obsessions with optics, from emerald lighting effects to Kaliko's magic winding spyglass.[7] He even built an eighteenth-century automaton updated in Tik-Tok of Oz (it was still in the air in many stories of the day, like Bierce's Moxon's Monster)[8] Most of all, the character Tik-Tok resembled an ad in the Montgomery Ward catalog. He was a "Smith and Tinkers, Patent, Double-Action Extra Responsive Thought-Creating Perfect-Talking Mechanical Man[9] Fitted with our Special Clockwork Attachment—Thinks, Speaks, Acts, and Does Everything, but Live."[10]

It is the whiff of Baroque, from the distance of America during the gilded age. But its traces are revealing. They work as a gentle critique of freewheeling capitalism. Baum equates Baroque systems of greed with industrial greed: The Nome, or Metal King, Ruggedo is a Carnegie as well as a Baroque merchant prince living underground in grottoes. Like a Spanish gold trader in 1560 Antwerp, or a free trader starting a Panic in 1873 New York, the Metal King is obsessed with bullion, "claims to own all the metals hidden in the earth," and possesses Baroque faerie magic.[11] It is part of Baum's literalism, like bran and pins and needles for Scarecrow's brains—his "bran new brains."

> "How do you feel?" Dorothy asks.
> "I feel wise indeed," he answered earnestly. "When I get used to my brains I shall know everything."
> "Why are those needles and pins sticking out of your head?" asked the Tin Woodman.
> "That is proof that he is sharp," remarked the Lion.

If Candide (before his Optimism evaporated) were a "magick" con man with a child's love of faerie—and a literal body, like an Arcimboldi man of books—he might have been a character in Oz. To make a fantasy as literal as possible is a running joke throughout Baum's stories. Every metaphor is as solid as something you buy at the hardware store. For example, imperialism, the search for raw materials, converts into an in-side/outside worthy of the Baroque—a walk-through that is both carnival and world's fair. In Rubber Country, "everything around … [was] of a dull gray color. [And the road] was soft and springy."[12] Even rocks and trees were made of rubber, but did not seem so. The false was as real as a filmed movie set. It was Artifice as American innocence, what crit-

ics would say later of Disneyland, but did not seem so. The false was as real as a filmed movie set. It was Artifice as American innocence, what critics would say later of Disneyland, "the gentle art of fakery."[13] Jo Candy harvests gumdrops and chocolates. Joe Files grows forests of steel file cabinets. Jo Clock runs an orchard of clock trees.

I am reminded of Roland Barthes's essay on seventeenth-century Flemish painting, on obsessive tactile materialism, what he calls "the world as object in itself." *Tik-Tok of Oz*, written while Baum was living in Los Angeles, is filled with these literalized squeezable places—hyper-solid homages to the artificial (Artifice).

In Color

Color invades the MGM classic film of *The Wizard of Oz*. It was an emblem of the authority of the studio system of the thirties, the world as "an object in itself." *Oz* was self-consciously a movie matte. The yellow-brick road was near the MGM commissary. The artifices of emerging film grammar as studio glamour operated not as self-reflexive new wave montage, but as theatrical, Baroque irony—to dive into the pure optical delight of false vision—in Busby Berkeley dance numbers, in white telephones, overdressed hotel suites. And in 1939, that same world-as-object is featured in the overripe use of color, notably in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, in *Gone With the Wind,* in Disney's *Snow White* a year before, and Fleischer's *Gulliver's Travels* in 1939, in color musical cartoons from every animation studio—and of course, definitively, in what were called "candy-box"[14] colors in The Wizard of Oz.

City of Light and Boilerplate

In 1893, Baum is living in Chicago while switching jobs yet again, from journalist to salesman. He visits the Hall of Machines at the Columbia World Exposition in Chicago, and is startled. Westinghouse had been commissioned to light the Fair, to showcase the alternating current invented by Nikola Tesla. President Cleveland had turned the switch on to "The City of Light," not only a pun about Paris, but also the blueprint for how to light an outdoor scripted space for over a century now. The view from the Court of Honor overlooking the lagoon inspired the lighting of Coney Island parks afterward, and led circuitously to

the lighting of Main Street in Disneyland (1955), and to casinos in Las Vegas today. The glowing outlines of the buildings seemed about to melt. So startling was the effect, it marked the end of the war that Edison waged against Tesla over which electric current was best. Next Westinghouse was commissioned to build the hydro-electric plant at Niagara Falls, in Tesla's polyphase system of alternating current generation and transmission.

Baum lingered at the Hall of Machines. He claimed that its radiance and design inspired the look of his Emerald City.[15] Inside the hall, he undoubtedly saw Boilerplate, the mechanical man who clearly influences the look of TikTok, and probably the Tin Man. Boilerplate was presumably his nickname with the press; he was a hoax invented in 2000. Boilerplate wore an upside-down metal soupdish helmet. He was supposed to be an iron soldier for wars to come. His inventor, Archie Campion (also at Westinghouse), spent nearly a decade promoting Boilerplate, but could not finance production. He presumably sailed and sledded Boilerplate down to the South Pole (1894); then circumnavigated the globe with Boilerplate (1901–1905). A doctored photo shows Boilerplate relaxing in 1893. He stands casually beside Campion's wife Lily while she leans over a rail, to get a panoramic view of the Fair.[16] Of course, all of this is an adroit hoax.

In 1903, the specialty watch company Helios presumably built a trial run of miniature Boilerplates. The master of the hoax, an expert on Victorian automata, Paul Guinan, "tried" to "rebuild" one of these.[17] The head resembles gas masks that soldiers wore in World War I, but as ornamental brass. The chest is as tubular as a Franklin stove, but gleaming with Baroque detail. Its knobby limbs were fully articulated, like an armature for special effects stop-motion seventy years later, or a thing in *The City of Lost Children*. I used to own a more square-shaped brass robot no larger than my thumb. I kept it in a tiny glass box. It had been cut and hinged by a local artisan in Mexico, where indeed these mechanical men have appeared in comic books. For over a century thousands of boilerplates have come down to us. They wait patiently. Patience has always been a virtue of the boilerplate; and of all hoaxes, including the Wizard of Oz himself.