

A 'ridiculous' view of Oz

Editor, News Chronicle:

A friend of mine recently was kind enough to point out an article written by Leslie J. Kelsay ("Oz is real," March 6).

I can appreciate Kelsay's education in economic theory. I cannot appreciate her use of "The Wizard of Oz" to carry her political, social-economic message — although, I suppose, she has every right to do so. It's just that I, for one, do not appreciate it.

Kelsay's vehicle to get her assumptions across is a beautiful fairy tale written for the young at heart. Of course, it is easy to use something written by another and theorize, to break it down for whatever purpose. Too, in the final analysis, merely guess what was behind an author's thinking and motivation.



Illustration by W. W. Denslow
Contemporary Books Inc.

Kelsay's buzzwords and cliché, as she attempts to take this great children's book into a never-never world of economic theory, was, to say the least, ridiculous.

To mention a few of her own buzzwords and phrases, such as (hold onto your hats): "bondage; marginal land; labor under industrial rule; the Populist Party; a coalition; gold standard; the presumed ignorance possessed by the Plains farmer."

Of course, the above is quoted out of context, but I think we get the message. On and on Kelsay goes with her article, ad nauseam.

L. Frank Baum, I need not assure you, wrote stories for the love of children. Within this realm he found for himself a place of personal satisfaction — a place of eternal youth. His shared discovery became the place where thousands of readers, both young and old, could travel merely by allowing their imaginations to soar, and then, from that vantage point, they could easily find the wonderful magical land of Oz.

The key to Oz belongs to the young at heart. His books are ablaze with excitement, imagination and love. Love for the child and yet, we all have the key to enter this world without fear of hurt. For nowhere in Oz is there a horrible bloodcurdling incident and the bad can never win. Oz is a land of laughter. It has stood the test of time. At this moment it has been 87 years. Yet the adventures of Oz are as fresh today as when they were first penned.

To the thousands of readers who wrote to him with their own suggestions, comments and their encouragement. Their letters were inspirational and dutifully answered and thereby a bond between them was formed. That bond produced from the year 1900 until his death in 1919 more than 60 books for children, many appearing under pseudonyms.

When Baum died he was eulogized by the newspapers of every kind, from The New York Times to small weeklies throughout the country, as America's greatest writer of fairy tales.

Baum never had to defend his books during his lifetime. He seems to have answered his modern critics in the preface to "The Lost Princess of Oz":

"... Imagination has brought mankind through the Dark Ages to its present state of civilization. Imagination led Columbus to discover America . . . Franklin to discover electricity. Imagination has given us the steam engine, the telephone, the talking machine and the automobile, for these things had to be dreamed of before they became realities. So I believe that dreams — daydreams, you know, with your eyes wide open and your brain-machinery whizzing — are likely to lead to the betterment of the world. The imaginative child will become the imaginative man or woman most apt to create, to invent, and therefore to foster civilization . . ."

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March 24