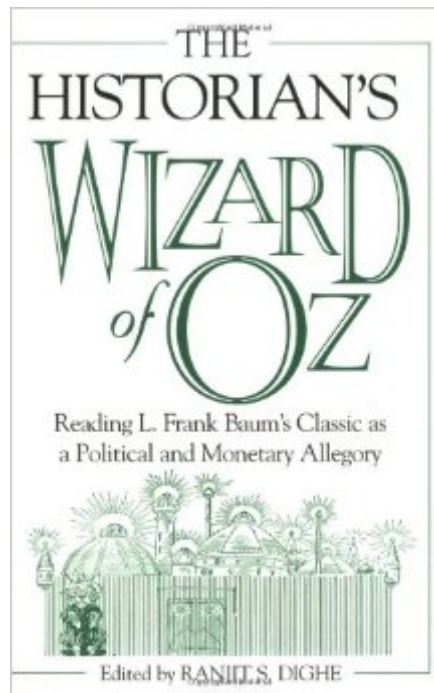


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The Historian's Wizard Of Oz: Reading L. Frank Baum's Classic As A Political And Monetary Allegory



Synopsis

The Historian's Wizard of Oz synthesizes four decades of scholarly interpretations of L. Frank Baum's classic children's novel as an allegory of the Gilded Age political economy and a comment on the gold standard. The heart of the book is an annotated version of The Wizard of Oz that highlights the possible political and monetary symbolism in the book by relating characters, settings, and incidents in it to the historical events and figures of the 1890s, the decade in which Baum wrote his story. Dighe simultaneously values the leading political interpretations of Oz as useful and creative teaching tools, and consolidates them in a sympathetic fashion; yet he rejects the commonly held, and by now well-debunked, view that those interpretations reflect Baum's likely motivations in writing the book. The result is a unique way for readers to acquaint themselves with a classic of children's literature that is a bit different and darker than the better-known film version. Students of history and economics will find two great stories: the dramatic rise and fall of monetary populism and William Jennings Bryan and the original rendering of a childhood story that they know and love. This study draws on several worthy versions of the Oz-as-Populist-parable thesis, but it also separates the reading of Baum's book in this manner from Baum's original intentions. Despite an incongruence with Baum's intent, reading the story as a parable continues to provide a remarkable window into the historical events of the 1890s and, thus, constitutes a tremendous teaching tool for historians, economists, and political scientists. Dighe also includes a primer on gold, silver, and the American monetary system, as well as a brief history of the Populist movement.

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Customer Reviews

This book is offered as a teaching tool on the history and economic issues of the 1890's. Mr. Dighe chronicles the interpretations of "The Wizard of Oz" as imagery of politics and money by various writers starting with Henry Littlefield in 1964. The author cautions that there are subtle differences between the movie and Mr. Baum's book. The color of Dorothy's shoes is one example. Mr. Baum's political leanings are a relevant topic of this book. They are basically an unknown. Mr. Dighe suggests that Mr. Baum probably didn't intentionally write "The Wizard of Oz" as political/economic allegory. But the book fills that role surprisingly well! The first chapter explains money and national finances in easy terms. Some of the subjects in that vein are; the gold standard, gold reserve, and fiat money. They are all efficiently defined. The story of "The Wizard of Oz" is printed in this book accompanied by numerous footnotes that are educational and interesting. Those footnotes detail some of the interpretations from authors like Henry Littlefield, Hugh Rockoff, and Ranjit Dighe himself among others. These interpretations are speculative, but some of them are glaringly obvious. The green in Oz's temple for the color of money is one. He includes William Jennings Bryan's speech at the end of the book. I have mixed feelings on Mr. Bryan. While he advocated the federal income tax (I don't care for that) he has his spot in history that was well-earned by his presidential campaigns and eloquent speeches. This book addresses a fascinating topic. The question of whether L. Frank Baum intended for his book to serve as an allegory for the politics of the 1890's is one that each reader will have to answer for themselves.

Ranjit S. Dighe's coverage of Baum's Wizard of Oz as an allegory is well designed as a teaching source for Populism. I found his chapter on the historical background of this period very helpful in understanding this complicated period. More importantly, the chapter that includes the original story with annotations that identify the symbolism is exactly what a researcher is looking for. References to Littlefield's interpretation and Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech makes this book a complete source for introducing this parable to history or economic students.

Great background on a subject that escapes most history textbooks. The author takes a "middle ground" and asserts that Baum is not really taking an active stance on the Gold/Silver standard, but merely using analogies from the political climate at the times. The theory makes sense, but a deep reading of the Wizard of Oz then seems to take on merely academic curiosity. 5 stars for the

background of the story, but less 1 star for the seemingly academic (pointless??) analysis of this nice story as it relates to the Gold/Silver standard. Of course, other writers have completely divergent opinions on Baum and his writings, so I would also get some books by those authors to even out the analysis a bit.

If you've wondered about alternative views of WWOZ, this is it. Covers the Populist movement very well and how Baum could have gotten material for WWOZ from that time period.

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