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Pen and Paper Cyborgs: Queer Embodiment in Baum and Denslow's The New Wizard of Oz

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ABSTRACT

The Wizard of Oz has often been depicted as a Queer text. Its pop cultural references extend from monikers for queer identities (i.e., friend of Dorothy) to a general Judy Garland fandom to iconic drag performances. However, very little attention has been paid to the original children's literature source of the many queer forms of *The Wizard of Oz*. Using theories of reproductive futurism and cyborg bodies, this paper interprets the many ways in which the inhabitants of Oz manifest queer embodiment and perform non-cis-heteronormative identity within the text. This analysis focuses especially on a 1903 illustrated edition of *The New Wizard of Oz* and the role the archive can have in creating new ways to interpret classic children's literature texts. The tangibility of the archival materials also contributes to the idea that making and unmaking corporeality can dramatically influence the potential queer interpretations of an imagined world.

KEYWORDS

Wizard of Oz, Queer theory, manufactured bodies, archival texts

Unlike the world of Dorothy's Kansas, bodies in *The New Wizard of Oz* tend to be composed of strange materials, vanish without a trace, or just generally exist in peculiar forms of non-humanity. The history of L. Frank Baum's *Oz* asserts that no one ever gets ill, ages, or dies (Baum, 2015), but that doesn't mean bodies don't change; in fact, the land of Oz is full of created beings who are, as Baum describes, "queerly made" (Baum, 2015). These beings, who I label queer cyborgs, necessitate readings which transcend human-centric and cis-heteronormative approaches. While scholars like Tison Pugh hold a similar view, most of these arguments neglect to take the illustrations in *The New Wizard of Oz* and the other original *Oz* publications seriously. Looking at Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurity in the context of cyborgs, this article examines an early copy of *The New Wizard of Oz* to discuss how both the visual and verbal text depict non-normative embodiment. Oz's queer cyborgs are part of a world where, without birth or death, pronatalism has lost its import. Instead, the many alternatively created cyborgs within the text are evidence that the project of making through a combination of magic and technology has effectively replaced the cis-heterosexual imperatives and allowed (largely non-sexual) queer relationships to develop instead. Adding a meta-textual layer of creation to manufactured illustrations, "queerly made" bodies within *Oz* enact their own magico-technical generativity as a new reproduction technique.

Not in Kansas Anymore: Adventures in the Archive

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My journey into the archive to find *The Wizard of Oz* was not without complications. My academic focus—especially regarding children's literature—tends to be firmly placed in the twenty-first century. In fact, I thought of *The Wizard of Oz* primarily because of its more modern adaptations. Baum's story, in its simplest version, depicts the protagonist, Dorothy, being transported to the magical alternative world of Oz in the midst of a tornado in her home state of Kansas. In Oz, Dorothy meets with three magical companions—the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion—as they all seek to gain a boon from the Wizard of Oz. In doing so, they encounter witches, flying monkeys and poorly placed geographic landmarks. This story, in the century since Baum first wrote it, has been adapted many times. A general fascination with its interpretations, a knowledge of its queer history (Douglas, 2003, Hastings, 2006, Kidd, 2011), and a personal commitment to viewing *Wicked* as a queer musical (Wolf, 2008) combined to make *The Wizard of Oz* feel less intimidating than other texts. The Homerton College Library's Archive contains a 1903 edition of *The New Wizard of Oz*, the original title of the text that would become the iconic *The Wizard of Oz*, as well as a copy of *The Marvellous World of Oz,* the second book in the series and *Glinda of Oz*, a much later book which follows the story of the famous Good Witch. I focused primarily on *The New Wizard of Oz* written by L. Frank Baum and, in this version, illustrated by W.W. Denslow. What I did not expect was how quickly I was entranced by Denslow's artistic vision of this fantasy world. I was fascinated by the ways that manufactured bodies interacted and, in my view, developed intimate relationships that appeared queerly romantic.

A distinctive quality of the archive is that I was constantly aware of a ticking-clock on my time with the text and thus felt an anxious imperative to notice every single detail. I was seated at a desk smelling the book, feeling the texture of paint on the pages and trying to give each line of ink as much attention as possible within the constrained time frame of archival research. I'm especially grateful for this experience because while some of the argument in this paper is formed through theory and close reading of the verbal text, still more relies on an interest in how visual representations of the characters in *The New Wizard of Oz*, or at least Homerton's Archive copy, brings a new dimension to a queer, posthuman reading of Baum's text through the relatively new technology of coloured printing. Denslow's use of colour imitates the magico-technology that brings queer cyborg bodies to life in *Oz*. As such, Denslow and his drawings are fully implicated in the non-biological reproductivity that permeates so much of *The New Wizard of Oz* and its sequels. Even though, to borrow the Tin Woodman's phrase, it was my "meat-body's" presence in the library that allowed these observations (Baum, 1903), what emerged from my archival time was an interest in how an archive is a distinctively productive place to look at queer cyborgs. Because the bodies in Denslow's illustrations are so clearly depicted as manufactured and physically created out of pen and paper, their constructed nature becomes particularly apparent. Without the actual visual text in the archive, it would have been much more difficult, if not entirely impossible, to arrive at this argument.

Queerly Made Characters: Defining the Queer Cyborgs of Oz

To examine this non-corporeal reproductivity, however, it is important to specifically define what I think queer cyborgs are. In *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*, Karen Coats provides a definition of "queer" which acknowledges that queerness extends to both behaviour and identity (Coats, 2004, p.110). Queerness as a term can "resist both heteronormative and homonormative classifications," transcending a strict definition of what exactly makes an individual queer, other than not fitting easily into the aforementioned classifications (Coats, 2004, p.110). For the largely non-romantic and non-sexual characters who inhabit Oz, a definition of queerness that does not rely on same-sex sexual behaviour is essential. The idea of a queer cyborg includes those whose bodies are formed in ways

that defy traditional senses of embodiment. This defiance removes them from what is typically perceived as normal; especially in the context of *Oz*, understanding how the individuals who have queer interactions are also manufactured beings is a crucial addition to the queer theory that underlies this article. Donna Haraway defines cyborgs as "creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted" (Haraway, 1985, p.174). Haraway's conception of a cyborg is additionally useful in how she imagines post-gender cyborgs. By including the possibility that cyborgs innately complicate, if not ignore, gender, the construct of hetero- or homonormativity becomes even more unapplicable to the queerly made bodies of characters like the Tin Woodman, Scarecrow, and Witches in Oz. I agree with Zoe Jaques when she argues that cyborgs demand a "new world order" in which lines "between the enlivened and the inanimate, between the organic and the artificial, are porous and fractured" (Jaques, 2015, p.18). The queer cyborgs I have examined are individuals who exist outside of either hetero- or homo-normative contexts, whose creation is untraditional and whose embodiment resides between or beyond the typical binaries that are placed on types of being.

To understand the queer cyborgs in *The New Wizard of Oz* is to untangle the implications of the lack of romance and biological reproduction in Oz. In *No Future*, Lee Edelman argues that queerness exists in opposition to reproductive futurism, or the heteronormative "pronatalist" storyline that animates everything from politics to narrative with a promise of a futurity that "clos[es] the gap" with the past (Edelman, 2004, p.24). Closing this gap is necessary because the figure of the Child represents a future that mitigates the fear accompanying the death drive, described by Lacan as the "quintessential unnameable" that underlies behaviour (Edelman, 2004, p.25; Lacan, 1996). He claims that queerness exists as a form of *sinthomo*sexuality that embraces *jouissance* while rejecting the pull of reproductive futurism (Edelman, 2004, pp.35). In the context of *The New Wizard of Oz* and its sequels, the lure of futurity that Edelman mentions is complicated by the lack of both birth and death within Oz. Instead, characters are made through either magic—in the case of the Witches' many transformations—or technological craft—in the examples of the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman's creations. Because Oz is a world largely populated by cyborgs, the juxtaposition of Edelman's theory with Haraway's assertion that "the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family" makes sense of this strange land in which the queerly made creatures, like the Tin Woodman, can exist without the strict bounds of the reproductive (death) drive (Haraway, 1985, p.175). Indeed, the cyborgs in Oz operate in an undescribed middle ground of Edelman's theory: they are uninvested in biological reproduction, not because they reject societal obligations and embrace *jouissance*, but because they have other (perhaps superior) forms of reproduction. In fact, the *Oz* texts are incredibly invested in acts of creation and moments of making, especially those that are asexual or homosexual in nature (Pugh, 2008). Oz represents a cyborg community that resists the imperatives of reproductive futurism without collapsing sociality in general.

Queerly Made for Each Other: The Tin Woodman and Scarecrow as Queer Cyborgs

Looking at Denslow's illustrations as part of non-corporeal creation, the art in *The New Wizard of Oz* transcends the verbal narrative to facilitate additional story within the text by providing visual embodiment to the characters of Oz. The Homerton Archive's copy of *The New Wizard of Oz* starts by centring the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow's relationship. The book's cover features the Scarecrow a moment before Dorothy walks by to save him; on the back, the Tin Woodman lounges casually (Baum, 1903). While the Tin Woodman and Scarecrow don't interact on the covers of the book, their presence anticipates how frequently these characters appear together. This choice seems intentional, at least on Baum's part, based on the way he describes the relationship between the Tin Woodman and

Scarecrow in his author's note in *The Marvellous Land of Oz*. Baum says he has received many "letters from children" asking him to write more about the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman (Baum, 1904, Author's Note). While this note was published after the copy of *The New Wizard of Oz* available at Homerton, Baum's focus on the popularity of this relationship suggests that their physical proximity is not only important to the text but is a centre point of the narrative itself. This is further supported by the importance of both characters throughout Baum's series, as they regularly take starring roles, almost always together.

The cover page of *The New Wizard of Oz* displays a similar pattern: the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow are positioned within an orange circle that mimics the colourful circles that often surround Dorothy in moments of magic (Baum, 1903). The Tin Woodman has his arms around the Scarecrow, who leans forward towards him (Baum, 1903). As in most depictions of the characters throughout the text, the details of their making are apparent in the image. The Tin Woodman's bolts and joints are the main details on his body and the Scarecrow looks somewhat scruffy with straw protruding from his head and chest, making their cyborg nature obvious (Baum, 1903). As is supported by the verbal text, these two "queerly made" characters also have an intense emotional attachment to each other (Baum, 1903). Their personal intimacy and clearly manufactured forms make the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow the most eminent queer cyborgs in this text, and their prominence at the beginning of the book creates an interest in these characters specifically before the reader otherwise engages with the story.

When the Tin Woodman first appears in *The New Wizard of Oz*, his manufactured tin body is frozen, a plot point which Denslow illustrates through almost a full page of pigment (Figure 1). The colour combines with the Tin Woodman's personal story to depict a tragic creation: he was turned into a cyborg because the Wicked Witch did not like his heterosexual relationship with her servant and enchanted the Woodman's axe to remove parts of his meat-body. To save the Woodman's life, a tin smith reconstructed him from tin, a material that keeps him safe from the enchanted axe. The tin smith, in remaking the Tin Woodman's body, participates in a creation that falls decidedly outside of heteronormative pronatalist reproductivity but successfully allows the Tin Woodman to live. However, in this process, the (now) Tin Woodman fell out of love with his fiancée, Nimee Amee, because his tin body did not have a heart. Jaques states that when Baum "comically reposition[s] body and gender politics" in the case of the Tin Woodman, it results in "a corresponding rejection of the wholly inhuman" (Jaques, 2015, p.179). Jaques believes that the Tin Woodman is too much of a cyborg because he loses his love for Amee and, in *The New Wizard of Oz*, the Tin Woodman seems to agree. In a two-page spread with dark green pigment over the text, Baum and Denslow together represent the Tin Woodman's determination to ask the Wizard for a heart and then "go back to the Munchkin Maiden and marry her" (Baum, 1903, p.61; Figure 2). The repetition of the full page of green colouration from when the Tin Woodman is first introduced to when he declares his intention to love Amee creates a clear pattern through the illustrations. Like when the Woodman is introduced, full pages of pigment accompany a focus on the non-functioning parts of his cyborg body: rusted joints and a missing heart. However, Denslow also chooses to highlight the non-human aspects of the Tin Woodman—the parts of him that are unable to engage in heteronormativity. On the page where the Tin Woodman declares his intention to get married, the illustration instead shows his tin body, gleaming proudly in the sun. If Jaques is correct that a fully tin body is too much of a cyborg to love Amee, then Denslow's illustration inherently undermines this heterosexual drive by celebrating a body made of tin.

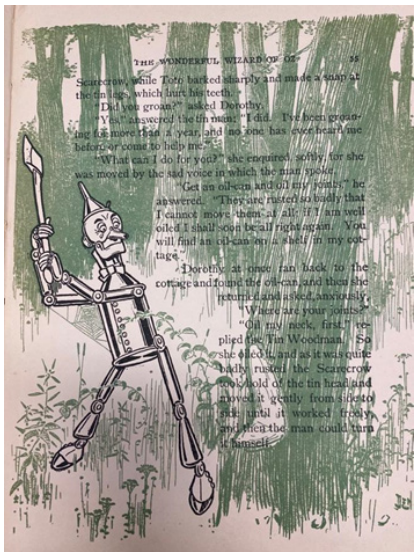

Figure 1

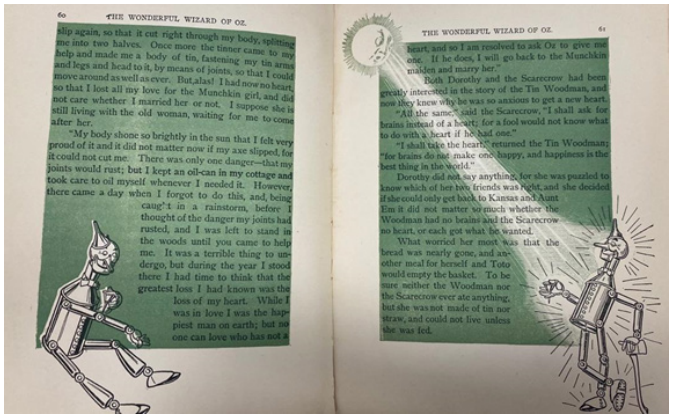

Figure 2

The subversively queer message in the illustration is reaffirmed by the text because, as Pugh notes, the Tin Woodman does not want to return to Amee once he has his heart again (Pugh, 2008). The process of being turned into a cyborg through magico-technological methods leaves the Tin Woodman fundamentally disinterested in his "meat body's" romantic past, providing an excellent example of the ways in which cyborg bodies work to create queer relational structures within *Oz*. For Pugh, the Tin Woodman's declining relationship with Amee is evidence of a queer connection with the Scarecrow (Pugh, 2008). In fact, Pugh contends that *The Wizard of Oz* features "a queer utopia built upon the antisocial rejection of reproduction" using the Tin Woodman and his relationship with the Scarecrow as an example (Pugh, 2008, p.228). Ultimately, a mediated reading of Pugh and Jaques' interpretations of the Tin Woodman's relationship with Amee results in this articles's view on queer cyborgs: that the Tin Woodman's non-biological creation, possible only through cyborg bodies, enables his return to his queer relationship with the Scarecrow. Specifically, the Tin Woodman is freed from the imperatives of heterosexual romantic reproductivity because Chopfyt, his somewhat-offspring, exists. Chopfyt, who is "a creature built from the Tin Woodman's old human body parts combined with new tin ones," eventually marries Amee, releasing the Tin Woodman from any romantic obligations to the meat-bodied woman (Jaques, 2015, p.179). Instead, the Tin Woodman can return to the Scarecrow because of his own cyborgian ability to create an alternative, amalgam body (Chopfyt) with which Amee is content. Non-biological creation effectively enables queer social arrangements

as characters navigate a world without (corporeal) birth or death.

Melting Witches, Proliferating Cyborgs: The Interaction of Non-Human Bodies and Illustrations

The New Wizard of Oz consistently reaffirms the significance of the queer cyborgs who drive the story, in part through their proliferation and centrality throughout the text. While the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow are a clear demonstration of this, a less obvious (but equally important) example is the way in which the Witches of Oz tend to disappear. The first instance of this is when the Wicked Witch of the East's corpse "disappeared," leaving "nothing but the silver shoes" for Dorothy to take (Baum, 2019, p.13; Figure 3). This first Witch's disappearance, also represented with a whole page of illustration, figures her embodiment only through the remaining magic that her corpse possesses, the silver slippers. By depicting the crushed Witch in this way, Denslow makes it clear that magic is directly involved in the staying power of a body. In a later scene, the Wicked Witch of the West vanishes when Dorothy throws water on her, "actually melting away like brown sugar" (Baum, 2019, p.112; Figure 8). Instead of leaving a body behind, the dead Witch becomes a "brown, melted, shapeless mass" who "began to spread over the clean boards of the kitchen floor" (Baum, 2019, p.114; Figure 8). While we are told little about how these Witches came to be, the moments of their deaths prove that they exist outside of ordinary humanity as cyborgs whose meat-bodies are magically maintained. Especially for the Wicked Witches, their antisocial imperatives align them effectively with Edelman's concept of *sinthomo*sexuality, or the queer rejection of sociality in pursuit of *jouissance*, allowing the disappearing Witches to fit within the definition of queer cyborgs, along with the more jovial members of this category (Edelman, 2004). Because the Witches are responsible for so much of the creation in Baum's *Oz* series—from Ozma/Tip's male form to Tik Tok the flying monkeys in their captured embodiment—their alignment with *sinthomo*sexual cyborgity perhaps explains why so many of the characters they interact with also fit queer categories.

Figure 3

Due to Denslow's distinctive illustrations, however, it is not just the Witches of Oz who are capable of disappearing. When the Witch of the North leaves Dorothy on the yellow brick road, she provides her final instructions, gives "a friendly little nod, whirl[s] around on her left heel three times, and straightaway *disappeared*" (Baum, 2019, p.15, emphasis mine). While this isn't a disembodiment that is inherently associated with death or manufacture like those of the Witches of the East and West,

the Witch of the North's disappearance also takes a full page spread in the 1903 story (Figure 4). The final page of the second chapter is an illustration of the Witch's vanishing, depicted through thinned horizontal lines contrasted with bolder, swirling lines to highlight that the Witch of the North's body is becoming less substantial than the wind around her (Baum, 1903, pp.28). The bold lines extend across almost the entire page, with the Witch of the North positioned to obscure parts of the writing. As the Witch's depicted body covers parts of the verbal text, Denslow's images, for a moment, become more focal—and thus important—than Baum's story. In Denslow's illustrations, as the Witch vanishes, she takes with her a magical slate on which she had just written Dorothy's name, which is a detail that does not exist in Baum's verbal narrative (Baum, 1903, p.28). The slate was how the Witch and the Munchkins had learned Dorothy's name. When the witch disappears holding the signifier by which both the other characters (and the actual readers of the text) can recognize Dorothy, the Witch of the North implicates Dorothy in the act of disappearance. In doing so, she connects Dorothy with the Witches of Oz in a significant way that is further emphasized by Dorothy's decision to wear white when "white is the witch colour" (Baum, 2019, p.20). Because the verbal text of *The New Wizard of Oz* doesn't say anything about the Witch holding the slate, Denslow's choice to include it as a detail in her disappearance adds this element to the text. Denslow expands on how Dorothy, in her unity with the other sorceresses, is cyborgifying as she becomes more immersed in Oz. He also uses the character's pen and paper cyborg bodies to accomplish this task.

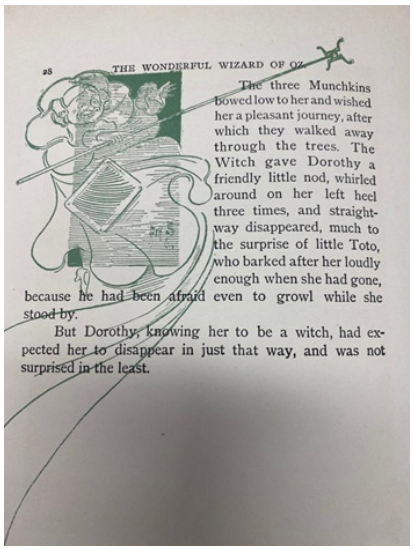

Figure 4

Denslow's illustrations, above and beyond the text, highlight ways in which queer cyborgs are central to the story of Oz. However, there is also the material reality that *no one* in Oz can have a "meat body" as the Tin Woodman discusses; all the characters' illustrated bodies are composed of paper, pen, and paint. As much as Witches and tinsmiths might manufacture bodies within the story, Denslow is the primary architect of bodies in the book because he holds the illustrative utensil. As such, the moments in which Denslow has character-illustrations interact with the text are worthy of note. For example, in the process of altering colours in the text, Denslow makes regional transitions within the narrative more explicit. Once Dorothy and her friends leave the original area of the Munchkins, the colours that Denslow uses change, as does the way the first word of each chapter is presented. In the first seven chapters of *The New Wizard of Oz*, the first word of each chapter is printed large, in black ink, against Denslow's illustrations. The characters interact with the first word and dropped capitals—for example, the Lion's tail covers the "t" in the large "They" in Chapter Seven and the Tin Man

seems to step on the “W" in the first word of Chapter Five as he follows Toto—but the words remain a different colour entirely, distinguishing between text and illustration (Baum, 1903, pp.75, p.50; Figures 5 and 6). However, as the party goes to the poppies at the beginning of Chapter Seven, leaving the yellow brick road, the land of the Munchkins and the space where Dorothy’s house landed on the Witch of the East, the colours of the illustration infiltrate the text, blurring the boundary between word and image. At the beginning of Chapter Eight, where the crane stands over the “Our,” the “O” remains in black ink like the rest of the text, but the “u” and “r” are printed in orange like the colour of the illustration around it (Baum, 1903, p.87; Figure 7). The way in which the illustrations were printed means that the colourful inks were layered over the black ink. The crane’s beak in Chapter Eight has blurrier lines because the orange has obscured the black details. Some of the creatures in Oz are losing their edges as the parts of their creation slips outside of the lines.

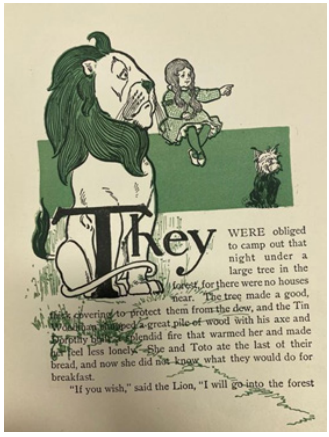

Figure 5

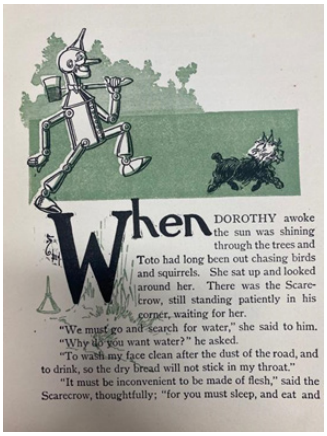

Figure 6

Figure 7

The way the colour leaks into the illustrations becomes especially significant in the parts of the text that use yellow ink, which take place in the land of the Wicked Witch of the West and the Winkies. The yellow ink’s application left a more profound impact (through lack of gradient and overall saturation) on the underlying illustrations and results in those images being more altered than others in the text. It is within this yellow portion that some of the oddest moments of *dis*embodiment occur: the Tin Woodman is destroyed, the Scarecrow is unstuffed, and the Wicked Witch is melted (Baum, 1903). In essence, the illustrations lose some of their detail and intricacy in depicting paper and pen

bodies at the same time that the queer cyborgs in the verbal story are losing their corporeality. The yellow illustrations begin when the Wicked Witch realizes that her attempts to attack Dorothy and her friends have failed and she, instead, calls upon the Golden Cap and the winged monkeys, connecting the yellow section of the text to magic, as well as printing technology and vanishing bodies (Baum, 1903, p.145). Unfortunately for the Witch, Dorothy melts her and—in perhaps the most dramatic of the yellow painted illustrations—the monochrome totality of the yellow paint is used to represent the Witch dissolving while Dorothy's body and the silver slippers remain clothed in sorceress' white, largely untouched by Denslow's paint (Baum, 1903, p.155; Figure 8). Once again, magical items are exempted from the dissolving bodies while Denslow's illustrations of *dis*embodiment highlight the up and downside of queer cyborg bodies. The fact that this moment, along with the other notable moments of bodies leaking out of their normative lines, is depicted with paint that seems equally liberal about escaping boundaries is yet another example of Denslow's illustration adding substantial context to Baum's work.

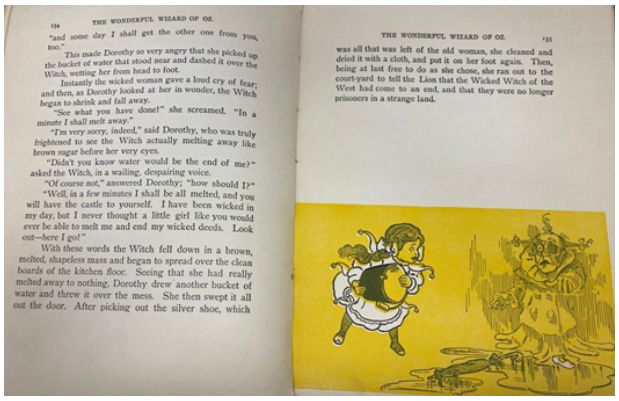

Figure 8

While the overlap of colour might be coincidence, its significance should not be overlooked. Denslow's illustrations unite events of embodiment and disembodiment. Seeing the queer cyborgs of Oz depicted materially through Denslow's illustrations– especially in moments like that of the yellow paint– underscores the created nature of the cyborgs. When the Witch of the West dissolves within the story, her depiction also vanishes from the remainder of the text; when the Tin Woodman is broken apart, his limbs are scattered in illustrations and reassembled in careful detail (Baum, 1903). *Oz*'s non-corporeal reproductivity is inescapable because it happens both within and outside of the text and, if one is willing to include illustration as an act of sexless creation, Denslow himself is implicated among the many creators of *Oz* whose magico-technological abilities populate this fantasy world. In the 1903 edition of *The New Wizard of Oz*, Denslow's illustrations bring a new dimension to the boundary defying nature of the queer cyborg subjects because some of the oddest aspects of *Oz* can cross into the real world as well. Characters like the Tin Woodman, the Scarecrow, the Wicked Witches, and even Dorothy are defined by the processes which go into making and unmaking their being. The archive is a fruitful place to analyse queer cyborgs because, in archives, texts take on their own strange in-betweenness, straddling the material and the imaginary in ways that demand different forms of exploration. Without the tangibility of the actual book that exists in the Homerton Archive, the striking nature of Denslow's participation in the creation of queer cyborgs would not seem as apparent.

Conclusion: There's No Place Like Homerton Archive

Taking into consideration the acts of creation involved in embodying the queer cyborgs of *The New*

Wizard of Oz in Denslow's illustrations and the many fiction cyborg creations that occur within this text, it is necessary to reflect again on the importance of archival research in understanding both *The New Wizard of Oz* specifically and early works of children's fiction more specifically. Especially in understanding queer characters, questions of embodiment are essential to understanding how queer texts and interpretations of stories work. And there is no way for a story to be more embodied than within the realm of an archive. Combining both Edelman and Harraway's theories to conduct a close reading of Denslow's original illustrations substantiates previous interpretations of Baum's *Oz* books as sites of queerness in children's literature. While Baum and Denslow were creating their books in times where queer identities were considered differently than they might be today, understanding these works with an enthusiastic embrace of their original, magico-technical generativity provides a new way to conceptualise some of the stories which have proven foundational to studies of post-humanism and queer theory in the field of children's literary studies.

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