

Okorafor/Chiang

Don't get me wrong....I am a believer in TRUE diversity. For literature as a whole to really be effective, there MUST be many types of people and creatures whose lives one can step into and experience. This need is part of why I even started writing. I wanted to add some new limbs to the body of literature. So let that idea stand.

However, people should also learn what it's like to be in other people's shoes. Boys should read about girls. White people should read about black people. Young people should read about old people....Stepping out of your skin in books should be encouraged. That's one of the biggest wonders of reading—getting a chance to really spend time in someone else's skin.

Nnedi Okorafor, “[Am I a Sellout?](#),” *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog*, November 29, 2007.

[Adam Liptak:] Your protagonist and his fellow mechanical beings remind me a little of Asimov's positronic robots: Why do we envision these sorts of beings as confined to logic, whereas we're not?

[Ted Chiang:] That's a good question. The idea that robots don't feel emotions is even older than the word “robot”; Tik-Tok, the mechanical man of Baum's *Oz*, predates Čapek's work by many years, and Tik-Tok was described as being incapable of emotion. I think it might be because we associate the coldness of metal with emotional coldness; I'd bet that the earliest stories of rag dolls coming to life didn't portray them as being unemotional.

I don't think the characters in “Exhalation” behave in a particularly robotic manner. Admittedly the story is not centered around emotion; it's more of a philosophical fantasy, like a Borges or Calvino story. I think it's the fact that the characters are made of metal that makes you perceive them as acting like robots, but they're living beings just like us.

(It's also worth remembering that living beings in our universe face the exact same problem as the characters in the story. Our universe is vastly larger than theirs so the timescale is vastly longer, but heat death awaits us all.)

Adam Liptak, “Ted Chiang: Author Spotlight,” *Lightspeed*, April 2014, www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/author-spotlight-ted-chiang.

Overleaf: L. Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee, 1907), [HathiTrust](#). The image hints that Baum's Tik-Tok is itself influenced by the post-Civil War dime-novel figure of the “Steam Man.”

Tiktok, The Machine Man

Dorothy stepped inside the little room to get a back view of the copper man, and in this way discovered a printed card that hung between his shoulders, it being suspended from a small copper peg at the back of his neck. She unfastened this card and returned to the path, where the light was better, and sat herself down upon a slab of rock to read the printing.

"What does it say?" asked the hen, curiously.

Dorothy read the card aloud, spelling out the big words with some difficulty; and this is what she read:

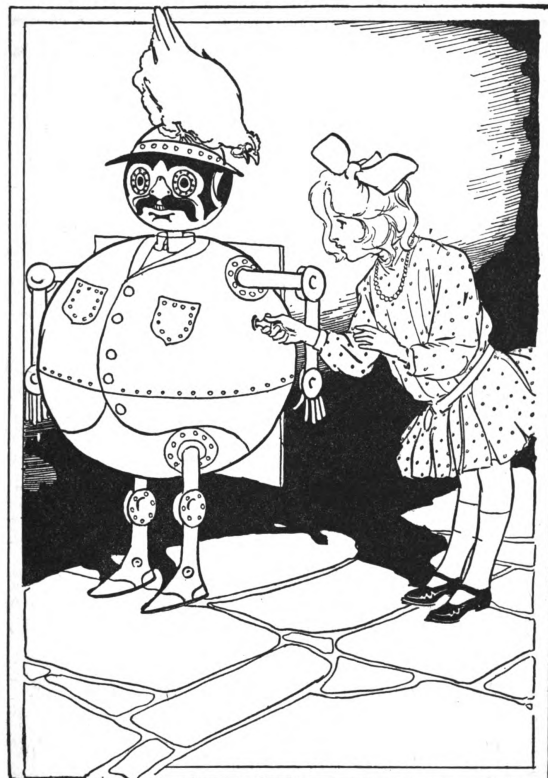
SMITH & TINKER'S
Patent Double-Action, Extra-Responsive,
Thought-Creating, Perfect-Talking
MECHANICAL MAN
 Fitted with our Special Clock-Work Attachment.
Thinks, Speaks, Acts, and Does Everything but Live.
 Manufactured only at our Works at Evna, Land of Ev.
 All Infringements will be promptly Prosecuted according to Law.

"How queer!" said the yellow hen. "Do you think that is all true, my dear?"

55

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DOROTHY WOUND UP NUMBER ONE

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"I don't know," answered Dorothy, who had more to read. "Listen to this, Billina:"

DIRECTIONS FOR USING:

For THINKING:—Wind the Clock-work Man under his left arm, (marked No. 1.)

For SPEAKING:—Wind the Clock-work Man under his right arm, (marked No. 2.)

For WALKING and ACTION:—Wind Clock-work in the middle of his back, (marked No. 3.)

N. B.—This Mechanism is guaranteed to work perfectly for a thousand years.

"Well, I declare!" gasped the yellow hen, in amazement; "if the copper man can do half of these things he is a very wonderful machine. But I suppose it is all humbug, like so many other patented articles."

"We might wind him up," suggested Dorothy, "and see what he'll do."

"Where is the key to the clock-work?" asked Billina.

"Hanging on the peg where I found the card."

"Then," said the hen, "let us try him, and find out if he will go. He is warranted for a thousand years, it seems; but we do not know how long he has been standing inside this rock."

Dorothy had already taken the clock key from the peg.

56

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O z m a o f O z

"Which shall I wind up first?" she asked, looking again at the directions on the card.

"Number One, I should think," returned Billina. "That makes him think, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, and wound up Number One, under the left arm.

"He doesn't seem any different," remarked the hen, critically.

"Why, of course not; he is only thinking, now," said Dorothy.

"I wonder what he is thinking about."

"I'll wind up his talk, and then perhaps he can tell us," said the girl.

So she wound up Number Two, and immediately the clock-work man said, without moving any part of his body except his lips:

"Good morn-ing, lit-tle girl. Good morn-ing, Mrs. Hen."

The words sounded a little hoarse and creaky, and they were uttered all in the same tone, without any change of expression whatever; but both Dorothy and Billina understood them perfectly.

"Good morning, sir," they answered, politely.

"Thank you for res-cu-ing me," continued the machine, in the same monotonous voice, which

58

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