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**Book review of Gregory Maguire's Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1996. 406 Pages. (Paperback, \$16). ISBN-10: 0060987103**

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*By Diana Dominguez*

I am a great fan of what are often referred to as revisionist fairy tales, made especially famous by authors like Anne Sexton (*Transformations*) and Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*). However, I must confess that Gregory Maguire's first entry into this genre with *Wicked* (first published 1995) made me nervous. It sat on my shelves for several years before I finally got the courage to dive into its pages this past summer. I was afraid that Maguire would irrevocably destroy my love for the original L. Frank Baum classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* on which his *Wicked* is based. I first read Baum's 1900 story when I was seven, and Dorothy became my first and still most beloved hero. But, take the plunge I did, and, to my joyful surprise, Maguire not only did not shatter my original love affair with Dorothy and Oz, but managed to provide a richer, deeper, and more satisfying journey back in to Oz through alternate paths I didn't expect, but which enchanted me.

It's obvious that Maguire, who has a Ph.D. in English and American literature from Tufts University, has mastered the art of reading between the lines and the tenets of critical theories like feminism, deconstruction, and post-colonialism. In *Wicked*, he deconstructs Baum's original *Wizard of Oz* and reconstructs it into a world that is at once familiar and foreign for those readers acquainted with Baum's Oz Chronicles. Maguire taps into the barely noticeable undercurrents present in the original tales and teases them out of their shadowy corners in order to provide a much more complex and nuanced look at Oz and all its inhabitants; Dorothy, in fact, has only a bit part, right toward the end of Maguire's novel, because this is really the story of Oz, the Wizard, Glinda, and, most importantly, the Wicked Witch of the West, who finally gets a name and a voice: Elphaba. Maguire's Glinda is imperious and exhibits a sense of entitlement, although she does have her good qualities as well; the Wizard in Maguire's Oz is a paternalistic dictator, whose outward benevolence lulls his new subjects into obeisance, but, Maguire makes it clear in his story that even a benevolent dictator is a dictator, and those who cross him don't stand much of a chance. Maguire's master stroke, however, is his creation of Elphaba, who not only gets a name but a biography that no reader will soon forget. Her "wicked" label is both underserved and justified; at one point in the novel, Elphaba accepts and embraces the classification in order to turn it to her own altruistic purposes: a classic feminist strategy championed by the likes of Luce Irigaray, who said that women must "embrace" the stereotype in order to dismantle it.

Surprisingly, Maguire leaves Dorothy intact, which I am both relieved and disappointed about. I would have liked to see what he could do with her character. *Wicked* has now earned a pride of place spot on my shelf, right next to my copy of the Annotated Centennial edition of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. I am now eagerly waiting for some focused reading time to dive back into Maguire's world of Oz in his second and third *Wicked* series books: *Son of a Witch* and *A Lion of a Man*.

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