

Wicked
The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West
by Gregory Maguire

About the Book

When Dorothy triumphed over the Wicked Witch of the West in L. Frank Baum's classic tale, we heard only her side of the story. But what about her arch-nemesis, the mysterious witch? Where did she come from? How did she become so wicked? And what is the true nature of evil?

Gregory Maguire creates a fantasy world so rich and vivid that we will never look at Oz the same way again. *Wicked* is about a land where animals talk and strive to be treated like first-class citizens, Munchkinlanders seek the comfort of middle-class stability and the Tin Man becomes a victim of domestic violence. And then there is the little green-skinned girl named Elphaba, who will grow up to be the infamous Wicked Witch of the West, a smart, prickly and misunderstood creature who challenges all our preconceived notions about the nature of good and evil.

Praise for the Book

"Amazing novel."

— John Updike, in *The New Yorker*

"Save a place on the shelf between *Alice* and *The Hobbit* — that spot is well deserved."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"I fell quickly and totally under the spell of this remarkable, wry, and fully realized story."

— Wally Lamb,
author of *I Know This Much Is True* and *She's Come Undone*

"Gregory Maguire's shrewdly imagined first novel . . . is part fantasy thriller, part psychological study, part political cautionary tale. It's all fascinating. And it's impossible to deny the magic of Gregory Maguire's prose."

— *New York Newsday*

"A staggering feat of wordcraft. . . . [Maguire] has created . . . one of the great heroines in fantasy literature."

— *Los Angeles Times*

Courtesy of HarperCollins

About the Author

Gregory Maguire

American writer (1954–)

Also known as: Gregory Maguire, Gregory Peter Maguire

Updated: 08/03/2006

Personal Information: Born June 9, 1954, in Albany, NY; son of John (a journalist) and Helen (Gregory) Maguire; married Andy Newman (a painter), June, 2004; children: Luke, Alex, Helen.

Education: State University of New York–Albany, B.A., 1976; Simmons College, M.A., 1978; Tufts University, Ph.D., 1990.

Politics: Democrat.

Religion: Roman Catholic.

Avocational Interests: Painting in oils or watercolors, song writing, traveling.

Addresses: Agent: (literary) William Reiss, John Hawkins and Associates, 71 W. 23rd St., Ste. 1600, New York, NY 10010; (film) Stephen Moore, Paul Kohner Inc., 9300 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 555, Beverly Hills, CA 90212; (publicist) Paul Olszewski, HarperCollins, 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022.

Career: Freelance writer, 1977–. Vincentian Grade School, Albany, NY, English teacher, 1976–77; Simmons College Center for the Study of Children’s Literature, Boston, MA, faculty member and associate director, 1979–87; Children’s Literature New England, Inc. (nonprofit educational charity), Cambridge, MA, founder, codirector, and consultant, 1987–. Resident at Blue Mountain Center, 1986–90 and 1995–2001; artist-in-residence, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1994, Hambidge Center, 1998, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, 1999.

Awards: Fellow at Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, 1978; One Hundred Best Books of the Year citation, New York Public Library, 1980, for *The Daughter of the Moon*; Children’s Books of the Year citation, Child Study Children’s Books Committee, 1983, and Teachers’ Choice Award, National Council of Teachers of English, 1984, both for *The Dream Stealer*; Best Book for Young Adults citation, American Library Association (ALA), and Choices Award, Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 1989, both for *I Feel Like the Morning Star*; Parents’ Choice Award, and Children’s Books of the Year citation, Child Study Committee, both 1994, both for *Missing Sisters*; Notable Children’s Book citation, ALA, 1994, for *Seven Spiders Spinning*; Books for the Teen Age selection, New York Public Library, 1996, for *Oasis*; One Hundred Best Books citation, Young Book Trust (England), 1997, Editors’ Choice selection, *Booklist*, 1999, One Hundred Best Books of the Year citation, New York Public Library, 1999, named to *Booklist’s* Top Ten Historical Fiction for Youth, 1999, Notable Social Studies Trade Book, National Council for the Social Studies/ Children’s Book Council, and Choices Award, Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2000, all for *The Good Liar*; Books for the Teen Age selection, New York Public Library, 2000, for *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*.

WRITINGS

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

- *The Lightning Time*, Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1978.
- *The Daughter of the Moon*, Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1980.
- *Lights on the Lake*, Farrar, Straus (New York, NY), 1981.
- *The Dream Stealer*, Harper (New York, NY), 1983, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2002.
- *The Peace and Quiet Diner* (picture book), illustrated by David Perry, Parents' Magazine Press (New York, NY), 1988.
- *I Feel Like the Morning Star*, Harper (New York, NY), 1989.
- *Lucas Fishbone* (picture book), illustrated by Frank Gargiulo, Harper (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Missing Sisters*, Margaret K. McElderry Books (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Good Liar*, O'Brien Press (Dublin, Ireland), 1995, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Oasis*, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 1996.
- *Crabby Cratchitt*, illustrated by Andrew Glass, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Leaping Beauty: And Other Animal Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Chris Demarest, HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2004.

“HAMLET CHRONICLES” SERIES; FOR YOUNG READERS

- *Seven Spiders Spinning*, Clarion (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Six Haunted Hairdos*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Five Alien Elves*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 1998.
- *Four Stupid Cupids*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2000.
- *Three Rotten Eggs*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2002.
- *A Couple of April Fools*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- *One Final Firecracker*, illustrated by Elaine Clayton, Clarion Books (New York, NY), 2005.

FICTION FOR ADULTS

- *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, Regan Books (New York, NY), 1995.
- *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, Regan Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Lost*, Regan Books (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Mirror Mirror*, Regan Books (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Son of a Witch* (sequel to *Wicked*), HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2005.

OTHER

- (Editor, with Barbara Harrison) *Innocence and Experience: Essays and Conversations on Children's Literature*, Lothrop (Boston, MA), 1987.
- (Editor, with Barbara Harrison) *Origins of Story: On Writing for Children*, Margaret K. McElderry Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- (Selector and author of introduction) *L. Frank Baum, A Wonderful Welcome to Oz*, illustrated by John R. Neill, Modern Library (New York, NY), 2005.

Reviewer for *Horn Book*, *School Library Journal*, and *Christian Science Monitor*; contributor of story "The Honorary Shepherds" to collection *Am I Blue*, 1994.

Media Adaptations: *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* was broadcast as a two-hour segment on the American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. (ABC) special *Wonderful World of Disney*, 2002; *Wicked* was adapted as a Broadway musical by writer Winnie Holzman and composer Stephen L. Schwartz and opened in 2003, and it has been adapted as an audiobook.

Sidelights

Gregory Maguire writes about people on the edge of crisis who manage to survive their ordeal and become stronger because of it. In forms as various as science fiction and fantasy, realistic problem novels, and rhyming picture books, Maguire explores the themes of loss, freedom, spirituality, the power of love, memory, and desire. Not one to shy away from complex plot development in his young-adult titles, the author also has a lighter side, as is evident in such titles as *Missing Sisters* and *Seven Spiders Spinning*. The former is a realistic portrait of growing up Catholic and handicapped; the latter is a broad farce about seven Ice Age spiders that have some fun in a small Vermont town. Much of Maguire's output has been for young readers, but he has also become a popular author of adult books that spoof fairy tales and fantasy stories. His best-selling *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* is a mature look at the land of Oz created by L. Frank Baum. The work sold so well that he created a sequel, *Son of a Witch*, in 2005.

"Maguire's talents now look unpredictable," Jill Paton Walsh wrote in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers* in 1989, and characterized his talents as "formidable and still developing." Paton Walsh was a prescient critic: since the early 1990s Maguire has authored several more children's books as well as adult fiction and has edited writings on children's literature. While fantasy was his first inspiration, he has since expanded his genres to include realism and humor. However, through many of his stories, both light and serious, one motif often recurs: the loss of a mother.

Maguire lost his own mother when she passed away while giving birth to him. With his writer father sick at the time of his birth, Maguire and his three older siblings were sent to stay with relatives for a time; Maguire ended up in an orphanage until he was reunited with his newly remarried father. Three more children were born to his father and stepmother, and Maguire finished his childhood years in a family of seven children that

was supported by his father's work as a humor columnist at the Albany *Times-Union* and science writer for the New York Health Department.

Maguire grew up in a family that cared deeply about words. In addition to writing professionally, Maguire's father was well known around Albany, New York, as a great storyteller, while his stepmother wrote poetry. Maguire wrote his first story at age five and continued writing them — some as long as a hundred pages — throughout high school and into college. In fact, he was only a junior in college when he wrote what would be his first published book, *The Lightning Time*. He had not intended the novel to be a children's novel. As Maguire explained to a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, "The publisher said, 'This protagonist is twelve years old. I'm sending you down to the juvenile department.' They were right."

The Lightning Time tells the story of young Daniel Rider, whose mother is away from home and in the hospital. While staying with his grandmother in the Adirondacks, he meets a mysterious female cousin and together the two struggle to keep Saltbrook Mountain free from development. There is magic lightning that allows animals to talk, a villainous developer, and plenty of eerie effects. A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* thought that Maguire handled this first novel "with professional aplomb," and Ethel L. Heins concluded in *Horn Book* that Maguire "creates tension successfully, and writes with conviction and style."

Maguire followed up the success of his first fantasy with a related title, *The Daughter of the Moon*, which features another cousin of Daniel Rider's, twelve-year-old Erikka. Again the missing-mother theme is explored, this time because Erikka's birth mother is dead and Erikka is being raised by a stepmother in Chicago. Searching for more refinement in her life, Erikka is drawn to a local bookshop as well as to a painting that an aunt has left with her. The painting is magic and Erikka can actually escape into the scene painted there, ultimately retrieving a long-lost lover of the Chicago bookshop owner. There are further subplots, resulting in a complexity that at least one critic found bogged down the novel. *Horn Book* critic Mary M. Burns, while noting that some elements of the ambitious novel did not work, nevertheless concluded that Maguire "has created a fascinatingly complex heroine and a rich collection of adult and child characters."

As the third of Maguire's early fantasy novels, *Lights on the Lake* was meant to form a trilogy of sorts. Again the protagonist is Daniel Rider, and he is once more in upstate New York at Canaan Lake. This is Maguire country; a love for New York state's Lakes region developed during the author's youth. After the one friend Daniel makes, an Episcopalian priest, leaves on a vacation, the young man suddenly finds himself living in two different dimensions, influenced by the strange mists on the lake. A poet devastated by the death of a friend soon occupies Daniel's attention, and he sees a way to help the grieving man by bridging space and time and linking the living with the dead. "The provocative theme incorporates philosophical and spiritual concepts," noted Burns in *Horn Book*. Although a reviewer for the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* thought that the elements of fantasy and realism did not work together, the reviewer did concede that Maguire "has a strong potential for polished and substantive writing."

Maguire's next book, *The Dream Stealer*, was the first book where Maguire felt he had created his own form. Set in Russia, the tale incorporates several age-old motifs from Russian folktales: the Firebird, Vasilissa the Beautiful, and Baba Yaga. The story of how two children set out to save their village from the terrible wolf, the Blood Prince, *The Dream Stealer* blends magic and realism to create a "fantasy full of tension and narrative strength," according to Heins in *Horn Book*. "A first rate fantasy with blood chilling villainy countered with high humor and heroism," concluded Helen Gregory in the *School Library Journal*. Paton Walsh, writing in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, called *The Dream Stealer* the work of "a writer finding his voice, and putting not a foot wrong."

Meanwhile, Maguire had taken a position at Simmons College in their fledgling program in children's literature and was earning his doctorate in American and English literature. Busy with studies and teaching as well as with the compilation of a book of essays in children's literature, Maguire did not publish his next fiction title for five years. *I Feel Like the Morning Star* is a bit of a departure in that the usual fantasy element is played down. Set in a post-atomic-war underworld, the book has a science-fiction feel, but is at heart an adventure novel about three rebellious teenagers who want to break out of their prison-like underworld colony. Roger Sutton, reviewing the novel in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, called attention to Maguire's penchant for figurative language and detail as a quality that "mired" an otherwise suspenseful escape novel. Other reviewers, such as Jane Beasley in the *Voice of Youth Advocates*, thought the work compelling, with Beasley noting that the "suspense builds to a 'can't-put-it-down' threshold."

The picture book *The Peace and Quiet Diner* followed, and then came *Lucas Fishbone*, an attempt at a sophisticated picture book for young adults. "Actually," Maguire once explained, "the writing in *Lucas* is some that I'm the most proud of. The story is a poetic meditation on death and the cycle of life, but somehow it never found its audience." Some critics were less than pleased, such as *School Library Journal* contributor Heide Piehler, who found the work "overwhelming and confusing," and a *Publishers Weekly* contributor who dubbed *Lucas Fishbone* "overwritten."

After the lukewarm reception accorded *Lucas Fishbone*, Maguire took another hiatus from publishing, although he continued to write his usual five pages a day. While living in London, he worked on what would become *Missing Sisters*. The story was inspired by a news report he saw on television about two brothers who were reunited after being separated at birth. Maguire took that germ of an idea with him when he returned to England. Shorter than his other books, *Missing Sisters* is also Maguire's first realistic story, employing none of the fantasy and science fiction elements of his earlier books. It is set in the 1960s and tells the story of a hearing- and speech-impaired girl who loses the one person close to her — a Catholic nun — but also finds her own missing sister. "The storytelling is sure and steady," wrote Roger Sutton in the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, while a *Horn Book* contributor called it "an unusual and compelling picture of life in a Catholic home."

The Good Liar, first published in Ireland, is another stylistic departure for Maguire. Set in occupied France in 1942 and written in epistolary style, it tells the story of three brothers who have a fibbing contest that ultimately becomes a matter of life and death. “At once poignant and thoughtful, laced with humor,” according to a reviewer for *Horn Book*, *The Good Liar* “offers readers an unusual perspective on history.” Carolyn Phelan commented in *Booklist* that the novel “carries the conviction of memoir rather than invention.”

Oasis, another young adult title, explores the effects of losing a loved one. When thirteen-year-old Hand’s father dies of a heart attack, Hand’s mother returns from the West Coast (where she had moved three years earlier). Hand resents that she abandoned him and suspects that his Uncle Wolfgang may have had something to do with his father’s death. But when he is able to help two immigrants the way his father would have if he had been alive, and when he discovers that his uncle is dying of AIDS, Hand begins to come to terms with his grief. According to a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, “Maguire steers clear of the earnest tones that often characterize YA bereavement stories.” Debbie Carton, writing for *Booklist*, noted: “Complex, believable characterizations are Maguire’s forte.”

Maguire’s largest shift in writing was the leap he made into adult fiction with *Wicked*. He first began considering writing for adults in the early 1990s, when he was living in England. “I wanted to write . . . about an evil character,” Maguire explained to an interviewer for *Publishers Weekly*. In thinking of who he wanted to focus on, he stumbled onto the Wicked Witch of the West. “If to each person in life comes one moment of brainstorming genius, I just had mine, because everyone knows who she is,” Maguire continued. “I wrote *Wicked* in five months.” Robin J. Schwartz, in her review of *Wicked* for *Entertainment Weekly*, posited that Maguire had begun to wonder how the Wicked Witch of the West became so wicked. “Since no one had the answer,” Schwartz wrote, “he did what any inventive, self-respecting writer would do — he created his own malicious character.”

The Witch in Maguire’s story, whom the author names Elphabra, “is not wicked; nor is she a formally schooled witch. Instead, she’s an insecure, unfortunately green Munchkinlander who’s willing to take radical steps to unseat the tyrannical Wizard of Oz,” according to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. But *Wicked* is not just a retelling. An early reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called the novel a “fantastical meditation on good and evil, God and free will.” Though *Wicked*’s early public success was slow, the book became a “cult hit,” according to a writer for *Entertainment Weekly*, and in 2003 an adaptation by Steven Schwartz and Winnie Holzman was launched on Broadway. The musical was an instant hit, received three Tony Awards, and played to sold-out audiences for months.

Ten years after the release of *Wicked*, Maguire was inspired by fan mail from those who had seen the Broadway show to return to Oz, publishing *Son of a Witch* in 2005. This time, his main character is Liir, who believes he might be the son of the now-dead Elphabra. Liir is on a mission to find and rescue the princess Nor, whom his mother tried

and failed to help. The story is definitely for adults only, containing scenes of violence, political oppression, and even a homosexual sex scene between Liir and a guardsman. “This book,” as the author explained to *Advocate* writer Regina Marler, “was . . . more and more about the way governments can harness false piety in order to preserve their own power.” Marler described the novel as being “even darker than *Wicked*” and a “complex and surprising sequel.”

Maguire has continued to focus on an adult readership with such books as *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, a combination of mystery, fairy tale, and fantasy set in seventeenth-century Holland. The story begins at a time when the country is engulfed in the tulip trade, with thousands on the verge of losing fortunes invested in tulip bulbs. Among these are Margarethe and her two daughters, Iris and Ruth. Following the murder of her husband, Margarethe brings her daughters back home to begin life in the village of Haarlem. Shunned by the locals, who believe she is a witch, Margarethe eventually finds work with an artist named Schoonmaker who lives on the outskirts of town. The family eventually moves to live with the van den Meers, a business family that has made its fortunes by luring people into making tulip investments. Iris, who is charged to serve as companion to Clara van den Meer, the daughter of the household, soon realizes that there is something amiss in the household and soon all their lives are in even greater turmoil as the three women learn to deal with this latest challenge. Reviewing *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* for the *Tribune News Service*, Brenda Cronin praised this “arresting” novel, in particular for its “precise and inventive use of language.” Cronin was especially impressed with Maguire’s ability to “conjure familiar scenes with new descriptions” and his perceptive observations about human beings. Similarly, a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* noted that Maguire is able to present “an astute balance of the ideal and sordid sides of human nature in a vision that fantasy lovers will find hard to resist.”

Maguire merges his interest in children’s fairy tales and adult fantasy fiction in his next publication, *Lost*. A “deftly written, compulsively readable modern-day ghost story,” according to a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, *Lost* traces the adventures of American writer Winifred Rudge as she visits London to research a novel about Jack the Ripper. Planning to stay with her cousin, John, in a family-owned house that once belonged to Ozias Rudge, who supposedly served as a model for Charles Dickens’s Ebenezer Scrooge, she arrives only to find that John has gone missing and no one seems to know where he has gone. As she attempts to solve the mystery, she realizes that strange, supernatural occurrences are transpiring, and an angry poltergeist begins to influence her investigation. “Though *Lost* reads with the pace and urgency of a thriller, it gradually becomes apparent that we are also getting a sophisticated study of a woman whose past is pushing her beyond her limits,” explained Robert Plunket in *Advocate*. Margee Smith, writing in the *Library Journal*, proclaimed that Maguire “makes the supernatural chillingly real.”

With *Mirror Mirror*, Maguire draws inspiration from the Brothers Grimm tale of “Snow White” to create a “dark and vivid” retelling, according to Susan H. Woodcock in the *School Library Journal*. Maguire sets the familiar tale in seventeenth-century Italy, under the rule of the eerie Borgias, known historically for their tendency to poison their

opponents. Snow White, here named Bianca de Nevada, is taken in by the family, but when Cesare, the brother/lover of Lucrezia, begins to look too closely at the young maiden, jealous Lucrezia condemns her to death. When Bianca is rescued by dwarves, they are not the familiar fairy-tale characters, but are instead a type of hybrid creature of flesh and stone, wakened only by Bianca's presence. "Readers will be intrigued by the new story and yet curious as to how the familiar elements are brought in," commented Woodcock. A critic for *Kirkus Reviews* proclaimed *Mirror Mirror* to be "every bit as good as *Wicked*: wicked good, in fact."

Though Maguire's adult novels have earned him both critical and popular success in the adult market, he continues to write children's novels. His "Hamlet Chronicles," set in the town of Hamlet, Vermont, was completed with a final installment, *One Final Firecracker*, in 2005. The stories, which feature the fifth-grade class of Miss Earth and her warring factions the Tattletales (the girls) and the Copycats (the boys), have covered territory including mutant chickens, ghosts, rampant cupids, and mysterious disappearances. The series was inspired by reactions of the kids to his speaking engagements. "Over the years," Maguire explained, "I've developed a very funny presentation. The kids usually howl at my speech, but when they learn that I don't have any humorous books, they're disappointed."

Maguire set out to cure that disappointment with the first book in the "Hamlet Chronicles," *Seven Spiders Spinning*, which has been characterized as something on the order of Roald Dahl meets Mother Goose. Seven spiders from Siberia escape en route to a lab for study and make their way to Vermont, where they discover seven girls whom they focus on as their mothers. The problem is, the spiders literally have the kiss of death, and the girls dispatch several of them. There are humorous subplots galore in this "high-camp fantasy-mystery," according to a *Publishers Weekly* critic. Hazel Rochman, writing in *Booklist*, commended Maguire on the "comic brew" and noted that the book would be "the stuff of many a grade-school skit." "A lighthearted fantasy," concluded a *Kirkus Reviews* critic, "that, while easily read, is as intricately structured as a spider's web." With *One Final Firecracker*, the author brings back many of the various characters from the other installments, including aliens, cupid, mad scientists, an elephant's ghost, and a spider from the first book who seeks to give one last fatal bite in what a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor described as a "winsome, bittersweet celebration of love and loss and loyalty."

Another critic for *Kirkus Reviews* called the overall formula for the series a "relentlessly edgy and smart one, and as such, a breath of fresh air." Ten-year-old reviewer Mark DiBona of *Storyworks* commented that *Six Haunted Hairdos* "is perfect for you if you like ghosts," and continued that Maguire is "really funny!" *Commonweal* reviewer Daria Donnelly noted that her son adores the series, and quoted him as saying: "This is a writer who knows how to make a kid laugh."

Beyond the "Hamlet Chronicles," Maguire also authored a collection of fractured fairy tales called *Leaping Beauty: And Other Animal Fairy Tales*. Not the same kind of retelling as his adult novels, the book still puts a spin on well-known classics such as

“Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” casting “Goldifox” as the hero; and the title story, a play on the familiar “Sleeping Beauty,” features a cursed tadpole. *Booklist* critic Kay Weisman called the book “a delightful collection, sure to be popular with sophisticated readers.”

Of his future plans as a writer, Maguire explained to a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*: “I don’t ever want to be a slave to my success, if you know what I mean. I don’t want to write ‘Rapunzel in Duluth’ just because *Mirror Mirror* is in Tuscany.” But critics will not be surprised if Maguire continues on in all his venues, creating more adult novels as well as continuing on with his works for children.

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BOOKS

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PERIODICALS

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- *Booklist*, September 15, 1994, Hazel Rochman, review of *Seven Spiders Spinning*, p. 136; September 15, 1996, Debbie Carton, review of *Oasis*, p. 232; April 15, 1999, Carolyn Phelan, review of *The Good Liar*, p. 1530; January 1, 2000, review of *The Good Liar*, p. 822; December 1, 2000, GraceAnne A. DeCandido, review of *Four Stupid Cupids*, p. 706; October 15, 2001, Kristine Huntley, review of *Lost*, p. 383; April 1, 2002, Kay Weisman, review of *Three Rotten Eggs*, p. 1328; September 1, 2003, Hazel Rochman, review of *Mirror Mirror*, p. 57; June 1, 2004, Kay Weisman, review of *Leaping Beauty: and Other Animal Fairy Tales*, p. 1726.
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Literature*, July-August, 1980, p. 219; February, 1982, review of *Lights on the Lake*; May, 1989, Roger Sutton, review of *I Feel Like the Morning Star*, p. 230; June, 1994, Roger Sutton, review of *Missing Sisters*, pp. 327-328.
- *Commonweal*, April 19, 2002, Daria Donnelly, “Illuminated Manuscripts,” p. 22.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, November 17, 1995, Robin J. Schwartz, review of *Wicked*, p. 73; October 24, 2003, Jennifer Reese, “Grimm Reaper,” p. 109; September 30, 2005, Gillian Flynn, review of *Son of a Witch*, p. 97.
- *Horn Book*, October, 1978, Ethel L. Heins, review of *The Lightning Time*, pp. 517-518; June, 1980, Mary M. Burns, review of *The Daughter of the Moon*; April, 1982, Mary M. Burns, review of *Lights on the Lake*, pp. 167-168; October, 1983, Ethel L. Heins, review of *The Dream Stealer*, pp. 576-577; July-August, 1994, review of *Missing Sisters*, pp. 454-455; July, 1999, review of *The Good*

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- *Kirkus Reviews*, July 15, 1994, review of *Seven Spiders Spinning*, p. 989; August, 15, 2001, review of *Lost*, p. 1154; March 1, 2002, review of *Three Rotten Eggs*, p. 339; September 5, 2003, review of *Mirror Mirror*, p. 1147; April 1, 2004, review of *A Couple of April Fools*, p. 333; May 1, 2005, review of *One Final Firecracker*, p. 542.
 - *Library Journal*, September 1, 1999, Francisca Goldsmith, review of *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, p. 234; October 1, 2001, Margee Smith, review of *Lost*, p. 141.
 - *New York Times*, October 24, 1995, Michiko Kakutani, review of *Wicked*, p. C17.
 - *New York Times Book Review*, November 26, 1995, review of *Wicked*, p. 19; December 12, 1999, Gardner McFall, review of *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*, p. 28; December 26, 1999, Malachi Duffy, review of *Wicked*, p. 19.
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Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Detroit: Gale, 2006

Source Database: Literature Resource Center

Author Interview

Q: Where do you get your ideas?

Gregory Maguire: A writer tries not to steal ideas from other writers. However, it is the nature of ideas — I think — that they rarely appear full-blown, like the visitation of an angel or a muse or a fairy godmother, but they grow in good soil, like a pumpkin or a hollyhock.

I try to keep the soil of my mind moist and rich by feeding it with other people's inventions (good books, movies, not so much with TV, except occasionally *The Simpsons*), and with a steady variety of different experiences. Trips to new places, meetings with friends old and new, times spent in memory. I use a journal to help me remember and record what I see and feel.

The works of other artists, the effect of a busy and curious life, the active exercise of my imagination and memory through a journal — these are the three main sources of ideas. But dreams, wide and gusty dreams, are a big help, too.

Q: What prompted you to write *Wicked*?

GM: I was living in London in the early 1990's during the start of the Gulf War. I was interested to see how my own blood temperature chilled at reading a headline in the usually cautious British newspaper, the *Times* of London: Sadaam Hussein: The New Hitler? I caught myself ready to have a fully-formed political opinion about the Gulf War and the necessity of action against Sadaam Hussein on the basis of how that headline made me feel. The use of the word Hitler — what a word! What it evokes!

When a few months later several young schoolboys kidnapped and killed a toddler, the British press paid much attention to the nature of the crime. I became interested in the nature of evil, and whether one really could be born bad. I considered briefly writing a novel about Hitler, but discarded the notion due to my general discomfort with the reality of those times. But when I realized that nobody had ever written about the second most evil character in our collective American subconscious, the Wicked Witch of the West, I thought I had experienced a small moment of inspiration.

Q: Have you had any experience with adaptations of your novels?

GM: *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* has been filmed as an ABC TV program for the Sunday evening Wonderful World of Disney. It is a serious two-hour drama, suitable for all ages. It stars Stockard Channing and Jonathan Pryce, and features as the stepsisters Azura Skye and Emma Poole. I went to Luxembourg to loiter on the set and watch the professionals do their work — a whole different kind of magic from writing.

For information on how I approached the business of watching *Wicked* be transformed into a Broadway play, read the liner notes of the original cast recording. I will add, though, that the play required a more streamlined plot — and a plot more suitable for general audiences — and therefore I observed the story change in ways I hadn't anticipated. Though not wholly delighted with some of the plot variations, nor am I dismayed. I understand that the translation from medium to medium requires modification, patience, and good spirits. Besides, haven't I made my own story by modifying earlier material, deeply beloved and staunchly supported by Oz purists (who called me heretical at first) and Judy Garland devotees? Art requires daring and sacrifice, and I was happy to let the professional dramaturges do their work. And, for the record: I love the show.

Q: What places do you love best in the world?

GM: The heart of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York is Blue Mountain Lake. It is isolated, beautiful, and serves as the setting for an arts colony called Blue Mountain Center, to which I have gone many times over the past fifteen years.

I feel myself at home in London, where I lived for five years, and in Greece, where my family on the maternal side originates. I don't speak much Greek, and I don't get there often, but I feel fully at home when the Olympic Airways jet touches down at the Athens International Airport.

Places that have literary associations can't help but thrill me — the Lake District in England, and Lucy Boston's Manor House at Hemingford Grey, Cambridgeshire; the tomb of Nikos Kazantzakis in Crete; the Emily Dickinson homestead in Amherst. I love Frederic Church's home, Olana, outside of Hudson, New York, as well as certain lively streets in Manhattan.

I love home best. Home, these days, is Massachusetts.

Q: What is your daily writing process?

GM: While I do some nonprofit work in literature education, and speak at schools as a visiting author, most days I try to write at home. This involves packing the kids off to their preschools, whirling about the house in a tornado of activity, doing beds, dishes, laundry, and general domestic rehabilitation. When that is done — it usually takes an hour — I get several hours at my desk. The writing occurs on the computer or by hand in a notebook; sometimes, to get myself started, I go out for a walk or a cup of coffee at a local café first.

When I have writer's block — which isn't often — a walk usually helps get things moving again, even if I don't feel that I'm thinking about anything pertinent while I walk. The reading of good poetry also helps that part of the mind that uses language to limber up, relax a bit — it's akin to shaking your sillies out, in the terms of that children's song. Working the kinks out, breaking your own bad habits of easy thinking.

Q: What do you hate most about writing?

GM: Stopping.

And writer's cramp.

Courtesy of www.bookbrowse.com

Discussion Questions

1. Gregory Maguire fashioned the name of Elphaba (pronounced EL-fa-ba) from the initials of the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, Lyman Frank Baum-L-F-B-Elphaba. *Wicked* derives some of its power from the popularity of its source material. Does meeting up with familiar characters and famous fictional situations require more patience and effort on the part of the reader, or less?
2. *Wicked* flips the Oz we knew from the classic movie on its head. To what extent does Maguire's vision of Oz contradict the Oz we're familiar with? How have Dorothy and the other characters changed or remained the same? Has *Wicked* changed your conception of the original? If so, how?
3. The novel opens with a scene in which the Witch overhears Dorothy, the Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Woodman gossiping about her. She's "possessed by demons," they say. "She was castrated at birth . . . she was an abused child . . . she's a dangerous tyrant." How does this scene set the stage for the story, and what themes does it introduce?
4. What is the significance of Elphaba's green skin? What are the rewards of being so different, and what are the drawbacks? In Oz — and in the real world — what are the meanings associated with the color green, and are any of them pertinent to Elphaba's character?
5. One of *Wicked*'s key themes is the nature and roots of evil. What are the theories that Maguire sets out? Is Elphaba evil? Are her actions evil? Is there such a thing as evil, a free-floating power in the universe like time or gravity? Or is evil an attribute of the actions of human beings? (Hint: Turn to pages 231 and 370 for scenes that will draw you into the conversation.)
6. Discuss the importance of the Clock of the Time Dragon. Does the Clock simply reflect events, or does it shape them? Why is it significant that Elphaba was born inside it? That Turtle Heart was killed by it? What revelations does it offer to Elphaba and the reader when she reencounters it at the end of the book?
7. The first section of the book ends powerfully but enigmatically when the young Elphaba is discovered under the dock, cradled in the paws of a magical beast as if sitting on a throne. How do you interpret this scene, and what do you think it foretells, if anything?
8. The place of Animals in society is an important theme in *Wicked*. Why does Elphaba make it her mission to fight for Animal rights? How else does social class define Oz, and why?

9. “[Galinda] reasoned that because she was beautiful she was significant, though what she signified, and to whom, was not clear to her yet” (page 65). Discuss the transformation of Galinda, shallow Shiz student, to Glinda the Good Witch. How does she change — and by how much? What is her eventual “significance,” both in Oz and in the story?
10. Discuss the ways in which Elphaba’s determination and willfulness lend purpose and order to her life, and the cost of being such a strong character. Elphaba isn’t the only strong female character in *Wicked*. How do Nessarose, Glinda, and Sarima deal with the issues of power and control? Where do each of them draw strength from? Is the world of Maguire’s Oz more or less patriarchal than millennial America?
11. *Wicked* is an epic story, built along the lines of a Shakespearean or Greek tragedy, in which the seeds of Elphaba’s destiny are all sown early in the novel. How much of Elphaba’s career is predestined, and how much choice does she have? Do you think that she was no more than a puppet of the Wizard or Madame Morrible, as she fears?
12. Early in their unlikely friendship, Galinda catches a glimpse of Elphaba and thinks she “looked like something between an animal and an Animal, like something more than life but not quite Life” (pages 78-79). Discuss the dual, and sometimes contradictory, nature of Elphaba’s character. Why does Elphaba insist that she doesn’t have a soul?
13. Who or what is Yackle? Where does she appear in the story, and what role does she serve in Elphaba’s life? Is she good or evil — both or neither?
14. Was Elphaba’s story essentially a tragedy or a triumph? Did she fail at every major endeavor, and thus fail at life; or because she refused to give up or change to suit the opinions of others, was her life a success? Is there a possibility that Dorothy’s “baptismal splash” redeemed Elphaba on her deathbed, or was this the final indignity in a life of miserable mistakes?

Courtesy of HarperCollins