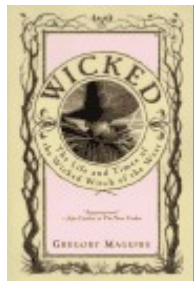




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West
By Gregory Maguire
Discussed March 1999

Background

The 1939 movie, "The Wizard of Oz" was based on the L. Frank Baum's 1900 children's book, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz". That book was so successful that Baum wrote 14 Oz books (as well as other fantasies that took place in the same world). After Baum died in 1919, the publisher hired others to continue the series and there were 40 Oz books in all. The last one was published in 1963. During the 80's and 90's there have been many Oz pastiches. Most of them have tried to duplicate Baum's work, some more successfully than others (the best of these pastiche authors is Eric Shanower who has written Oz stories in both prose and comic book form). A few authors have taken a more adult spin on the land of Oz. These include Gregory Maguire's "Wicked," Geoff Ryman's "Was" (which I am planning to recommend to the group one of these days), and Philip Jose Farmer's "A Barnstormer in Oz."

In "Wicked," Maguire created an Oz that was a mixture of the movie Oz and the Oz from Baum's books, but with a harder edge. Elphaba physically resembles the movie Witch rather than the book Witch, but the crows, bees, and wolves come from the book. Glinda is entirely the movie Glinda and not the book Glinda. The Tin Woodman's origin (whereby the Witch of the East enchants his axe) is taken right out of the original book. The tiktoks, many of the place names, and the history of the Ozmas (including the Wizard spiriting away Ozma Tippetarius) come from Baum's Oz sequels and, in a few instances, from Baum's other fantasies (typically with a Maguire twist). For more details about what happened to Ozma Tippetarius and how she is restored to the throne, read the second Oz book, "The Marvelous Land of Oz" (sometimes entitled "The Land of Oz"). The name "Elphaba" is a Maguire creation based on L. Frank Baum's initials.

There exists an organization for fans of the movie and books called the International Wizard of Oz Club. The Club publishes a magazine, The Baum Bugle, and holds several conventions each year. More information on the Club is available at <http://www.ozclub.org>.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it reasonable to believe that Elphaba is the same person as the Wicked Witch of the West in the Wizard of Oz movie? Why or why not?
2. Similarly, is the Wizard in Wicked consistent with the Wizard in the movie? How about Dorothy?
3. In what sense (if any) was Elphie "wicked?"
4. In what sense (if any) is Glinda "good?"
5. Is there a particular event in the book that is a turning point in Elphie's life?
6. Wicked is often described as an exploration of the nature of good and evil. Is it successful in that regard?
7. There are a lot of social systems and struggles occurring in this story - the discrimination against the Animals, the social and class strata, the gender struggles. Are these struggles described and/or played out as reflections of specific social struggles in our real world, or are they allegories of social struggle in general?
8. How does the nontraditional family Elphaba grows up in, specifically the relationship between Turtle Heart and Elphaba's parents, affect Elphaba as an adult?
9. "Wicked" does not have a lot of overtly gay themes, but is a staple of gay bookstores. What is it about Wicked that resonates with gays?
10. The silver shoes of the book became ruby slippers in the movie to take advantage of the Technicolor. What color were the shoes in Wicked?
11. Even though many of the historical and setting details are from the books, the main characters (Elphie and Glinda) are based primarily on the movie characters. Could this book succeed *without* the cultural iconography and the ubiquitousness of the movie?
12. There's a very short scene, very easy to miss, that indicates that the Wizard has suffered the barbs and arrows of discrimination himself. What significance does this play in the overall message of the book?