

The Reading Guide

Reading Group Questions

1. On p.148 Liir asks 'Are the mighty deserving of thrones'? How would you answer this question?
2. How does evil manifest itself in SON OF A WITCH?
3. On p.159 Shell says 'Martyrdom implies a religious faith' – would you agree?
4. The Service opens with these lines: 'A notion of character, not so much discredited as simply forgotten, once held that people only came into themselves partway through their lives'. What do you think is meant by this?
5. Were you surprised by the ending of SON OF A WITCH?
6. 'No magician in the world had yet mastered the art of prophecy, so far as Liir knew.' Would you like to know what the future holds?
7. 'The colossal might of wickedness... how we love to locate it massively elsewhere. But so much of it comes down to what each one of us does between breakfast and bedtime.' Is this really true? Can this statement be related to the characters in SON OF A WITCH? Could they have behaved differently?
8. 'The workings of the human heart could be as various and imperturbable as the workings of human communities.' In what way are events in Maguire's Oz reflected in today's world?
9. How are religion and magic portrayed by Maguire?
10. 'A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true spirit, restore their government to its true principles.' Thomas Jefferson, 1798. Discuss the true principles of government in the Land of Oz.

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Further Reading

Wicked by Gregory Maguire

Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister by Gregory Maguire

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum

The Bloody Chamber by Angela Carter

Classic Fairytales (Norton Critical Edition) by Maria M. Tatar

From Beast to Blonde: On Fairytales and their Tellers by Marina Warner

The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales by Bruno Bettelheim

About the Book

Back in the land of Oz, the adolescent boy Liir was last seen hiding in the shadows of the castle after Dorothy did in the Witch. Bruised, comatose, and left for dead, Liir is tended to at the Cloister of Saint Glinda by a silent novice called Candle, who wills him back to life with her musical gifts. What dark force left Liir in this condition? Is he really Elphaba's son? He has her broom and her cape - but what of her powers? In an Oz that, since the Wizard's departure, is under new and dangerous management, can Liir keep his head down long enough to grow up?

About the Author

Gregory Maguire is a bestselling author who has earned rave reviews and a dedicated following for *Wicked*. He received his doctorate in English Literature from Tufts University, and has taught at Simmons College and other Boston area colleges. He has also served as an artist-in-residence at the Blue Mountain Centre, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and Hambridge Centre. Gregory has lived in Dublin and London, but now makes his home near Boston, Massachusetts, with his partner, their two sons and daughter.

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Interview with the Author

For those who may not have heard of you, can you briefly tell us a little about your books. How would you describe them?

Some people say my books are retellings, and I think that makes me sound like a translator. What I do admit to, with great pleasure, is reintroducing people to familiar stories, often from childhood, with new information, a new spin, to show them that the old familiar characters are still full of juice and sass, the old situations still valid and even shocking.

I would imagine that you're now best known for WICKED. How did it feel, seeing it as a stage musical?

One of my first vocational hopes was to work in the theatre. When I was in grade school I wrote and produced plays that were put on for audiences in the school. I had no adult supervision but lots of adult approval, and early hopes for me were that I would go into the theatre. (Probably the hopes were that I would go away into the theatre, or into prison, or into the seminary...) So for WICKED to hit the boards as a big, important musical was a kind of childhood dream come true, even if my original vision of the story was fiction (and at its heart my conception of the truest WICKED remains as a novel, not the lovely and fun play it has become).

How about your other books, are there others that you would like to see either on the stage, or on the big screen?

There was some interest recently in putting CONFESSIONS OF AN UGLY STEPSISTER into an opera. I would enjoy that hugely! Indeed, once I thought it might be a musical and I began to write lyrics for it out of a benighted sense of privilege. CONFESSIONS was filmed by ABC TV for a movie, starring Stockard Channing and Jonathan Pryce, and I enjoyed that experience hugely, too.

What first triggered you to start writing, and what age were you? Were those early writings published?

I came from a lower-middle-class family that was governed by strict and uncompromising parents. My dad wrote for the newspapers, and my stepmother, who raised me, was a poet. By example they showed an enthusiasm for and interest in the worth of good writing, and of reading as an entertainment, and so I wrote from childhood. My first novel for children was published in the US in 1978 and in the UK in 1979.

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Where else do you think your life may have taken you if you hadn't become a successful author?

Since part of my family is Greek, I had high hopes of running what in the States we would call a greasy Greek diner. I also had aspirations toward being an architect until I learned how much math one needed to master. I was very aware from my earliest days that I wanted to be self-employed and in one or another branch of the arts, either as a painter or a musician, an actor or a novelist. The only branch of arts that seemed beyond me was dance, as I have the legs of a turtle.

You've also written a number of children's books. Could you tell us a little about them?

I began my career publishing books for children, and from 1978 until WICKED was published in 1995 I had published a dozen novels and picture books. None of them had made much of a splash. In recent years I have done a series of comic novels with titles like SEVEN SPIDERS SPINNING, SIX HAUNTED HAIRDOS, FIVE ALIEN ELVES, FOUR STUPID CUPIDS, etc. But I am proudest of a children's book called WHAT-THE-DICKENS: THE STORY OF A ROGUE TOOTH FAIRY. It marries my affection and high regard for children with the themes and elements I have brought to my adult novels. It will be published in the United Kingdom sometime soon, I'm told.

Which do you enjoy writing more, books for adults, or for children?

Writing for children is harder. Children are so bestial and impatient. With an adult audience I can linger lovingly over a description or a rumination, and know that if one reader doesn't care for it, he or she will hang on until the next exciting bit, usually. A child reader has no such resources and no politeness to speak of, and will happily chuck the offending volume at my noggin and go outdoors and play instead. That makes me very skittish about writing for kids, and in some ways I think makes me try harder.

Out of all your books, do you have any favourites, or have you enjoyed them all?

In that the commercial success of WICKED has given me the funds with which I could feel comfortable enough to adopt my own three children, WICKED has to be my favourite. But my newest books are the ones closest to bloom, so the sweetest in my senses. WHAT-THE-DICKENS, mentioned above, and this autumn's A LION AMONG MEN. That said, readers have very much enjoyed CONFESSIONS OF AN UGLY STEPSISTER and I think next to

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WICKED it is the book most often cited by readers in autograph lines as their favourite. It is my second-to-WICKED bestseller, too.

Do you enjoy reading yourself? Who are some of your favourite books or authors?

I'd be avoiding the obvious if I didn't say I had been mesmerized by Philip Pullman's HIS DARK MATERIALS trilogy. Interestingly I have most often enjoyed reading English novelists – not always contemporary. Among my favourite books of all time are MISTRESS MASHAM'S REPOSE and THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING by T. H. White; QUEEN OF THE TAMBOURINE by Jane Gardam; UNLEAVING by Jill Paton Walsh; THE TOWERS OF TREBIZOND by Rose Macaulay; and THE REALMS OF GOLD by Margaret Drabble. I admire Amis and McKeon and that lot, but here are some recent favourites among American writers: Stona Fitch's SENSELESS, Ron Hansen's MARIETTE IN ECSTASY and HITLER'S NIECE, and Jess Walter's CITIZEN VINCE. I also found Christopher Moore's farcical LAMB oddly moving as well as a comic maelstrom of a novel.

What are you promoting at the moment, and can you tell us anything about what is coming next?

I mention above A LION AMONG MEN, which is the third volume in the proposed quartet to be known as THE WICKED YEARS. The first three books are WICKED, SON OF A WITCH and A LION AMONG MEN. I have just begun to sketch out ideas for the fourth and final volume.

Extract

So the talk of random brutality wasn't just talk. At noontime they discovered the bodies of three young women, out on some mission of conversion that appeared to have gone awry. The novice maunts had been strangled by their ropes of holy beads, and their faces removed.

Her nerve being shaken at last, Oatsie Manglehand now caved in to the demands of her paying customers. She told the team drivers they'd pause only long enough to dig some shallow graves while the horses slaked their thirst. Then the caravan would press on across the scrubby flats known, for the failed farmsteads abandoned here and there, as the Disappointments.

Moving by night, at least they wouldn't make a sitting target, though they might as easily wander into trouble as sidestep it. Still, Oatsie's party was antsy. Hunker down all night and

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wait for horse's hoof, spears? Too hard on everyone. Oatsie consoled herself: if the caravan kept moving, she could sit forward with her eyes peeled. Out of range of the carping, the second-guessing, the worrying.

With the benefit of height, therefore, Oatsie spotted the gully before anyone else did. The cloudburst at sunset had fed a small trackside rivulet that flowed around a flank of skin, water-lacquered in the new moonlight. An island, she feared, of human flesh...

Reviews

'Gregory Maguire's WICKED falls into a fascinating sub-genre of novels that revisit well-known stories as much in the spirit of criticism as homage. Maguire...makes sense of Baum's whims, creating a credible Oz for grown-ups, with religion, politics, racial tensions, an economy, mythology, humour and sex... As moving and tragic as it is refreshing and scurrilous... Outstanding.' *Independent*

'This is a triumph. In startling prose that suggest Cormac McCarthy crossed with a witty Charles Frazier...the comedy never overpowers the drama, nor the sophistication' *Daily Telegraph*