

The Producerly Land of Oz

Gregory Maguire's novel, *Wicked*, straddles the line between many layers of transformative works. On one layer, the novel is fan fiction; it is a parallel novel set in L. Frank Baum's Land of Oz and tells the story of a pre-Dorothy Oz. The novel focuses on the Wicked Witch of the West (Elphaba) and her family. Not considered canon Baum's Land of Oz, *Wicked*, and Maguire's subsequent Oz novels (*Son of a Witch* and soon-to be published *A Lion Among Men*), definitely qualify as transformative works and fan fiction. Focusing on unexplored aspects of an original text (like the life of the Wicked Witches) makes *Wicked* a transformative work, while a fan using Baum's world and characters to tell new stories qualifies *Wicked* as fan fiction. Beyond its relationship to the Oz canon, *Wicked* has developed a fandom of its own. The book has been transformed into a Broadway musical, and will eventually become a movie. *Wicked*, the book and the musical, blurs the lines between the producer and the consumer of a text. Non-canon material created by a fan, becomes canon to a different set of fans. Fan fiction, such as *Wicked*, not only acts as a reinterpretation of a producerly text, but creates parallel universes which can then be reinterpreted as producerly texts in their own right.

Roland Barthes and John Fiske discuss the idea of producerly and writerly texts. Writerly texts allow the reader to produce their own meanings, or ideas from the text. According to Barthes: "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (Barthes, 4). The writerly text acts as a template on which the consumer can rewrite or redefine meanings and ideas. Fiske takes the idea of the writerly text outside of high literature and into popular texts. A producerly text is slightly different from a writerly text. It "has the accessibility of a

readerly [text]...but it also has the openness of the writerly one” (Fiske, 104). Producerly texts still act as a template for the reader’s ideas, but can be understood and rewritten by a much larger audience. Harry Potter is a producerly text, while something like Finnegan’s Wake would be a writerly text.

World creation helps keep a given text producerly. Accessible texts need room to grow and develop in order to allow for consumer produced meaning. Creating fictional worlds allows almost unlimited room to rewrite texts. Even J.R.R. Tolkien, who created one of the most well thought out universes, leaves room for additional interpretation and new stories about Middle Earth. Information gaps in texts leave room for reinterpretation, which leads to more traditional fan practices. Fan fiction takes advantages of many of informational gaps that the original producers leave. A significant portion of Harry Potter fan fiction features the Marauders and their days at Hogwarts, an area of the Harry Potter universe Rowling left mostly empty. The nearly unlimited room of a created world, combined with recognizable rules, makes created worlds keep a text producerly, and the perfect ground for fan fiction.

Wicked, despite being essentially a piece of fan fiction, works as a writerly text, thanks to the ambiguities in the characters and situations in the novel. *Wicked*, as a novel, leaves plenty of ambiguities for the reader to respond and produce his or her own answer. The reader must puzzle out even fundamental questions about the text. For instance, Elphaba can be read as both a hero and an anti-hero, depending on what the reader chooses to focus on. Many situations in the novel, such as terrorism against a repressive government, become equally open to the reader’s interpretations. *Wicked* forces the readers to make interpretative decisions about the text.

World creation helped *Wicked* spring into existence in the first place. Without the creation of Oz, and the gaps in pre-Dorothy Oz lore, *Wicked* would not have been written. *Wicked* works off of the pre-existing world, and uses many of the same rules, just fleshed out in certain places. Maguire's use of a pre-existing world also keeps *Wicked* a producerly, rather than just a writerly text. The Land of Oz provides a reference point for readers, and makes the text more accessible than if Maguire had created the entire world himself. World creation acts as both a starting point for the work, and a reference point for readers. Dense writerly texts, like *The Lord of the Rings*, can become producerly texts if the reader understands the backdrop of the text.

Wicked, by attempting to fill certain information gaps, created a related but slightly different world: Maguire's Oz. Some of the aspects of Maguire's Oz, especially in *Son of a Witch*, contradict the canon Oz created by Baum. *Wicked* the musical goes even further than the book in ignoring canon. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the scarecrow is just that, a scarecrow. In the musical, the scarecrow is Elphaba's lover, Fieryo, turned into a scarecrow due to a spell gone wrong. The lands of Oz described by Maguire, particularly Quadling Country (the southern portion of Oz), bear only passing resemblance to Baum's Land of Oz. The gaps in Baum's world gave Maguire a starting point for his own texts, but these stories do not perfectly match up with the canon Oz. In trying to fill or adjust certain aspects of Oz, Maguire created a different, but still recognizable Oz.

The producerly aspects of *Wicked* also helped Maguire's Oz develop as a separate world from the canon Oz. *Wicked* asks the reader to answer many questions, particularly about the nature of Elphaba and the Wizard. The original text has much simpler answers to those questions. By changing the fundamental personalities and motivations of certain

characters, actions take on different meanings and the Land of Oz changes. The openness of *Wicked*, and the nature of world building, created a parallel world to the canon Oz based on Maguire's interpretation and ideas on a previous producerly text.

The transformative nature of *Wicked* created a parallel world to the canon fan text. As a work of fan fiction, *Wicked* sprang from the producerly aspects of Baum's land of Oz. Maguire, by writing a producerly text that did not strictly abide by pre-existing canon, created his own Land of Oz, related to, but separate, from the original Oz. The Maguire Oz has its own canon, such as making the Wizard Elphaba's father, that continues in both *Son of a Witch*, and the musical. As a transformative work, *Wicked* spawned a reinterpretation, the Broadway musical version of *Wicked*, which both follows Maguire's canon, but changes aspects. While the musical turns Fiyero into the Scarecrow, the novel only hints at the possibility. Not all worlds or fan fiction creates its own universe with its own fandom. The successes of *Wicked*, however, shows that fan production does not end with one creation based on an "original" text, but can create layers of parallel universes, each based on producerly fan texts.