

Restoring Female Agency:
Wicked as a Feminist Fairy-Tale Revision

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By Erica N. Fox
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Liberty University
College of Arts and Sciences
Master of Arts in English

Student Name: Erica N. Fox

Dr. Virginia Dow
Thesis Chair

Date

Dr. Matthew Towles
First Reader

Date

Dr. Stephen Bell
Second Reader

Date

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Introduction

Fairy tales are extremely popular in Western society, and they feature prominently in the education of children. Children grow up watching and reading about daring princes who go on quests, fight dragons, and save the beautiful princesses from danger. And while this form of storytelling seems innocent enough, it begs the question: Why do the princesses need to be rescued? When children grow up consuming different iterations of this narrative structure over and over again, they can prematurely subscribe to the gender roles that these fairy tales depict. While little boys have the bold and courageous princes to idolize and imitate, young girls instead have female role models who are oftentimes depicted as victims or passive objects of male affection in their fairy tales, rather than as autonomous agents. Fairy tales that victimize their female characters are quite influential in Western society, so much so that many authors are revising these tales in order to create more realistic depictions of the female characters for both children and adults to appreciate.

One author who has taken up the task of fairy tale revision is Gregory Maguire. Maguire has constructed a revisionary fairy tale for the contemporary era that clearly centers on the choices and experiences of its female protagonist. In his novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West (Wicked)*, Maguire's protagonist, the Wicked Witch of the West, possesses the unapologetic agency that she lacks in the original book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, without sacrificing the fairy tale's original plot. Elphaba, Maguire's Wicked Witch, is not a victim of her fairy tale's circumstances. Instead, she is a woman whose choices and actions determine the course of her entire life, including the way she dies. Maguire's fairy tale revision is compelling because the emphasis is not on his protagonist being an imitable woman, or a woman at all, but on her being an understandable person, complete with flaws and complexity of

motivation.

Elphaba's characterization stands in stark contrast to the female protagonists popularized by researchers and collectors like Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Anderson, and the Grimm brothers. European fairy tales have endured the test of time and have remained relevant in Western society because of these collectors' efforts. In addition, modern-day storytellers, such as Walt Disney, have launched these tales into everlasting fame through numerous adaptations that are popularized by cutting-edge marketing strategies. In *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, Jack Zipes explains, "Our contemporary concept and image of a fairy tale have been shaped and standardized by Disney so efficiently ... that our notions of happiness and utopia are and continue to be filtered through a Disney lens even if it is myopic" (17). Cinderella's face adorns the backpacks, t-shirts, and shoes of many young girls, but few people are aware that her story and the stories of many others have shifted and changed throughout history. Many cultures outside of the United States have their own versions of Cinderella, and any number of well-known fairy tales, but the versions we are most familiar with are those introduced by Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms. However, these men were not the originators of the tales – far from it. As collectors, Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms not only transcribed and compiled the folktales and children's stories they received from numerous sources, but they also chose to edit those stories to better reflect their own cultural values (Haase, "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" 23-24). In essence, the collectors took stories from an oral, matrilineal tradition and appropriated them to create new versions that promoted patriarchal superiority. In doing so, these men diminished the agency of the female fairy-tale characters in order to perpetuate their own cultures' ideals of femininity.

In fact, revising these stories to accentuate a masculine perspective was a dangerous

endeavor, especially considering the original contexts of the fairy tales. Maria Tatar explains in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* that much of the folklore that collectors like the Grimm brothers studied to create their collections originated as a form of entertainment for adults (23). When Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms published their newly revised tales, the focus transitioned from bawdy, overtly explicit adult entertainment to tales that convey basic morality and wisdom to children and emphasize gender-specific behaviors and roles (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 70). This transition is questionable because the revised stories portray the typical female protagonist as an imitable ideal, but an ideal that relegates women to lives of passive domesticity. The women in these tales receive money and love – a “happily ever after” – as a reward for submitting to the patriarchy and its expectations for appropriate female behavior, namely passivity and dependency (Rowe, “Feminism and Fairy Tales” 246). Children in Western society, both male and female, encounter fairy tales at an early age, and many internalize the rules of gender performance that these fairy tales have popularized while they are still developing their own sense of self. The normalization of passive woman and heroic man in subsequent revisions of European fairy tales further inculcates each new generation exposed to these tales with the idea that gender equals adherence to accepted cultural norms, and that other possibilities are not worth examining.

One method of promoting gender equality that has gained popularity in recent years involves revising the fairy tales, primarily the ones compiled and revised by Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimm brothers, to create versions in which the female characters have agency and purpose outside of furthering patriarchal gender ideals. According to “The Fairy Tale and its Uses in Contemporary New Media and Popular Culture Introduction,” technological advances and the interactive nature of the internet make engagement with fairy tales more accessible than

ever before, which means that a wide variety of authors and creators are now approaching fairy tales with a revisionist mindset (Schwabe 82). In these revisions, the women are more than mere objects waiting for a strong male influence to guide their lives; rather, the women have personal desires and can make choices that allow them to take ownership of their lives.

Some may wonder why feminist fairy-tale revisions are necessary; in fact, many believe it is pointless for authors to dedicate time and energy to revising stories that have already been stripped of their original contexts and are adapted so frequently that the very act of adaptation is now a cultural cliché. Such detractors believe that authors' efforts should focus on constructing a new form of narrative, one that fully endorses the notion that equality and representation are necessary aspects of literature in a modern world. What these naysayers do not seem to acknowledge is that fairy tales are never going to fade from the public memory. The stories that Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms compiled are so interwoven with Western civilization's understanding of itself that nearly every child could explain the bare bones plots of *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and many other popularized tales. Jack Zipes explains in his book *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* that these fairy tales constitute the canon that played a "key role in the civilizing process of Europe and North America" (125-6). Scrapping this culturally-instilled groundwork in favor of reinventing the wheel would be unwise and, almost certainly, a waste of time. Not all feminist-leaning authors can construct a completely original method for effectively portraying female characters; in order to convey equality for women through their works, the authors must draw from both the literature of the past and methods that have already proven effective.

To feminist authors, fairy tales are a gift. Fairy tales are so well-known, so culturally adored, that they will inevitably be consumed, no matter how many iterations already exist. As a

result, co-opting the fairy-tale genre is an effective way to allow a great number of feminist authors to highlight the strengths and expose the failings of the stories that have defined Western culture's adolescence, all without going through the trouble of concocting entirely new premises and characters that may or may not be accepted by their audiences. Rather than tossing aside the tales and characters that are deemed two-dimensional or misogynistic, feminist revisionists are free to explore, experiment, and construct new methods of portraying these tales in an appropriate way for their modern audiences. Zipes also notes that "[w]omen have never broken with the past ... they have seized it, made the past their own, and, in the case of fairy tales, have greatly influenced and inspired male writing" (*Relentless Progress* 124). Through various modes of revision, feminist authors have been able to avoid the temptation of blacklisting the fairy-tale genre, which has historically portrayed female protagonists as cookie-cutter versions of the "ideal" woman. Disney's Snow White and Cinderella are examples of this identical characterization: both beautiful girls have animal friends and stepmothers who are determined to cause the girls pain, and both are whisked away from their misfortunes by a handsome prince; these protagonists could swap lives, and little would change in their movies' plot structures. In the face of these lackluster characterizations, feminist authors have chosen to revitalize the stories by adding depth and agency to the female protagonists.

Feminist Theory in *Wicked*

Many authors use fairy tales as a canvas to revitalize the female protagonists that they believe are either poorly characterized or only exist to further the patriarchal definition of the ideal woman. The feminist revisionist's goal is to create realistic female characters who possess irrevocable agency within their stories, but not because the characters are female. Instead, these characters deserve agency and the ability to influence their own stories because they are

representations of people. Revisionary feminist authors have the power to change the world around them, so fairy tale characters should also have the power to change their own worlds. The focus on women in these revisions has less to do with gender, and more to do with the prominence of female characters in classic fairy tales, coupled with their notable lack of agency within their own stories. Throughout *Wicked*, Maguire draws on several feminist concepts that span centuries. He uses each of these assertions to further develop and characterize his female protagonist, Elphaba, as a realistic woman within her story and culture. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the feminist authors who elaborate on each of these concepts, even though they are associated with different waves of feminism.

The first of these authors is Mary Wollstonecraft, and even though her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was written towards the end of the eighteenth century, her argument that education is necessary for female betterment is a foundational tenet of modern feminism: “Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle: that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue, for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence in general practice” (72). The former half of this quote is significant because it reveals the hurdles that Wollstonecraft faces when putting forth her argument. For Wollstonecraft, it is not enough to argue that women should be educated because they are people. Instead, Wollstonecraft argues that women should be educated because it will make them more useful to the men they are connected with. By structuring her argument in this way, Wollstonecraft reveals what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call the “anxiety of authorship” that many female authors face: “[A] radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (*The Madwoman in the Attic*

48-49). This is not to say that Wollstonecraft is incapable of creation. Instead, her anxiety of authorship manifests in how she must temper her writing for her male readership. Unlike the male writers of the time, Wollstonecraft cannot rest her assertions on the basis of her predecessors or her contemporaries because female authorship on this subject was practically non-existent then. Therefore, Wollstonecraft is left with the task of becoming a precursor to others, and she does so by entering the conversation on women's rights armed with both intelligent opinions and concessions to her audience.

The justification that Wollstonecraft provides for educating women does not necessarily reveal her true feelings on the subject. However, she presents her argument for female education in this way to appeal to her audience's values: The men with the power to allow female education certainly desire partners in marriage, ones who can hold clever conversations and raise their children to be morally upright members of society. If education is all it takes to achieve this sort of wife, then Wollstonecraft's audience would be fools to dismiss her proposal. Gilbert and Gubar explain, "Her battle...is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of *her*. In order to define herself as an author, she must redefine the terms of her socialization" (49). If Wollstonecraft wants to be taken seriously as a writer when the field is dominated by males, she cannot begin by contradicting men's belief that women possess an otherness that men must protect. Instead, she must acknowledge this belief, although she does not agree with it, while also explaining how women's lack of education limits their usefulness to men. By presenting her argument in this way, Wollstonecraft creates a foundation for future feminist authors on which to build their own arguments, one which will allow those authors to write what they mean, rather than worrying about how men will receive their works.

Elphaba's depiction as a free-thinking female directly reflects the call to pursue

knowledge and truth that is emphasized in the latter half of Wollstonecraft's quote; she longs for knowledge, and she pursues it in various ways for the majority of her life. This pursuit is not an easy task, considering that Oz is a country that still segregates its higher learning institutions according to gender. Moreover, pursuing knowledge for a man's sake is never Elphaba's goal. She has no desire to better herself so that she may become a good wife. Instead, Elphaba uses her education to question the information that teachers and government officials present, and when she finds that information fallacious, she tries to share the truth with the other citizens of Oz. For example, Madame Morrible and the Wizard begin spreading propaganda about the differences between Animals and people when Elphaba is in college, but rather than accepting their propaganda as fact, Elphaba conducts her own research with Doctor Dillamond to discover the truth. Then, Elphaba attempts to share this truth with the Wizard because she believes in the Enlightenment understanding of knowledge that Wollstonecraft lays out: "Truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence in general practice" (72). In order to discover truth, Elphaba pursues education throughout her life because she believes that learning and sharing the truth will create a better society.

Another feminist author whose ideas find resonance in *Wicked* is Judith Butler, who wrote *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in 1990. Despite the two-hundred-year gap between Butler and Wollstonecraft's works, both of these authors provide meaningful insights for a feminist analysis of Maguire's *Wicked*. Butler's evaluation of gender as a social construct is only possible because of the groundwork that Wollstonecraft lays in her *Vindication*. Indeed, Gilbert and Gubar explain that feminist authors like Butler can only write freely because of Wollstonecraft and the other feminist writers who paved the way:

For if contemporary women do now attempt the pen with energy and authority, they

are able to do so only because their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture. (51)

Butler does not suffer from the same anxiety of authorship that Wollstonecraft does because Wollstonecraft serves as her precursor. Instead, Butler wrestles with feminism as it has been defined by her foremothers, just as the male authors who suffer from an “anxiety of influence” must confront the “inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of their predecessors but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from such ‘forefathers’” (Gilbert and Gubar 46). As a feminist author, Butler neither minces words, nor feels the need to accommodate the male reader in the way that Wollstonecraft does. Building on Wollstonecraft’s logical argumentation for women’s rights in her own writings, Butler effectively uses her precursor’s works as a jumping off point and devotes all of her work to addressing what she perceives as a flaw in the feminism of her day.

In *Wicked*, Elphaba embodies Butler’s assertion that biological sex and gender are wrongly assigned to each other in order to reinforce a social binary. According to Butler, gender and sex are disparate features, and should not be restrictive:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (10)

Differentiating sex and gender is a prominent subject of Butler's research and, given Maguire's status as a member of the LGBT community, he would have been familiar with the feminist rhetoric of the time. It is fitting that *Wicked*, which was published in 1995, allows its female protagonist to explore gender's complicated nature as she matures. Throughout his novel, Maguire presents Elphaba's relationship with her own gender as complex, and her behaviors constantly push back against the gender binary that Oz has in place. Despite her biological femaleness, Elphaba has almost nothing in common with the women around her. Whether through her dislike of feminine, ostentatious clothing or her marked interest in social reform, Elphaba is constantly differentiated from her peers, and she is profoundly disinterested in adopting their standard of what constitutes feminine behavior. Her refusal to conform to Oz's gender expectations makes Elphaba an outcast for most of her life. According to Butler's reasoning, Elphaba's sex does not determine her gender; her femaleness should not restrict her to solely feminine qualities, but Oz's socially constructed gender binary does not acknowledge the difference between female and feminine. As a result, Elphaba is an oddity for more than her green skin, and she lives most of her life emotionally isolated from others.

In this thesis, I argue that Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* stands as an effective fairy-tale revision because it provides agency to its female protagonist in a variety of ways. The primary goal of the feminist fairy-tale revision is to give the female characters agency, not because they are women, but because they are functioning characters within the story. In essence, gender is only relevant because it has been the tool used to limit and oppress a specific category of people, so females must become the focus of the revisions to create balance. In Maguire's novel, the Wicked Witch has a name – Elphaba. She has a history. Maguire constructs a realistic woman with thoughts, feelings, and unshakable

beliefs that guide the choices she makes and, ultimately, lead to her eventual death. Maguire's feminist fairy-tale revision succeeds because its purpose is not to teach anything. It neither stands as a symbol of perfect feminist characterization, nor is it didactic; Maguire merely gives Elphaba desires and motivations and fears, similar to the qualities he would give any male character. By presenting Elphaba's life and choices without judgment or apology, Maguire creates a fairy-tale revision that encapsulates the message that so many feminist revisionists have failed to convey: the female protagonist deserves agency not merely because she is female, but because she is a fully-developed person.

Chapter One – Methods of Feminist Fairy-Tale Revision

Revising fairy tales to reflect a feminist perspective is a noble endeavor, even though the methods employed allow room for error. While there are many authors who attempt to create fairy-tale revisions that embody a feminist perspective, not all are successful, and some do even more harm than good in their attempts. Nevertheless, fairy-tale revision allows modern authors to transform the two-dimensional women of Anderson, Perrault, and the Grimms' collections into realistic females who have agency and the ability to influence the course of their stories. In addition, revisions and re-imaginings rejuvenate the original stories for subsequent generations of readers, which is how the folk stories of Western Europe have achieved the global influence that they currently hold. Zipes explains that these innovative fairy-tale revisions “explore the dormant potential of the classical tales to bestow knowledge on us ... they free ancient knowledge in the name of the author, who is not afraid to declare his allegiance. Innovative fairy tales take sides, are partial” (“Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale” 109). They allow the authors to comment on real-world problems, while also expressing the importance of autonomy for all characters, regardless of gender.

In essence, the authors who choose to revise a specific fairy tale are presented with an identical house that they are free to decorate in whatever way they please, and their methods of decoration fashion the newest fairy-tale adaptation. Of course, there will be some authors and decorators who believe that some deep-cleaning and a fresh coat of paint will be enough to create a workable house, and on some level, they are correct. However, the authors who choose to create feminist versions of these fairy tales must do extensive renovations in order to make their visions come to life.

One popular form of feminist revision in fairy tales involves the female protagonist

questioning her gender and acknowledging or rejecting the various stereotypes attached to it. In the article, “Feminist Frauds on the Fairies? Didacticism and Liberation in Recent Retellings of ‘Cinderella,’” Crowley and Pennington assert that effective feminist fairy-tale revisions must “challenge and resist ideologies encoded into traditional tales,” or they risk “reinscrib[ing] gender norms even as they seek to be liberated from them” (300-1). In a sense, the authors who choose to decorate their fairy-tale revisions with an emphasis on gender interrogation must be willing to knock down a few walls so that the interior of the house can be viewed in a new light. These experimental authors have no qualms with questioning the structure of the house, and they are more than happy to rip through its ceiling to put in a skylight. As Lewis Seifert explains in his “Introduction: Queer(ing) Fairy Tales,” an effective fairy tale revision must “work against the expected, the familiar, the predictable” and expose the “unexpected, unfamiliar, and unpredictable sides” of the tales, often with an emphasis on “gender, sexuality, and structures of domination” (17). By doing so, the authors can shed light on the answers to questions that were not addressed in the original story. For example, if Cinderella did not fall in love when she danced with the prince, her story would have ended quite differently. If she and the fairy fell in love instead, she may have never gone to the ball. In addition, if even one of the stepsisters behaved kindly to Cinderella, her home life could have been much different. Creating alternate versions of the story’s events not only allows the authors the creative freedom to transform Cinderella into a thinking, reasoning, three-dimensional character, but it also prevents the revised tale from becoming a scene-for-scene repetition of the original tale.

However, some feminist authors who attempt to use gender examination as the focus of their fairy-tale revisions are less than successful. Crowley and Pennington note that the focus of these ineffective revisions is primarily on the power structures that exist within the story: “[The]

notion of power depends on essentialism: men and women act out particular gender roles (men in control, women submissive) that once overturned mean the world is in its proper place, usually with women in charge” (304). This form of essentialism posits that there are nonnegotiable characteristics that define types of people. However, Judith Butler says, “The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it” (10). When essentialism is applied to gender, a person’s biology, his or her maleness or femaleness, naturally defines the characteristics of that person, meaning maleness is inextricably tied to masculinity, and the same is true of femaleness and femininity. The fairy-tale authors who subscribe to the idea of gender essentialism can rarely have any lasting effect on the genre because, as Crowley and Pennington express in their article, these revisions only reinforce the need for conformity to gender norms: “We argue that a feminist fraud on the fairies is *prescriptive*, one that imagines gender as singular, essential, and purely identity-based and is also reflected aesthetically versus a feminist retelling that is *descriptive*, one that imagines gender and genre as complex, intersectional, and multifaceted” (302, 304). While gender exploration is an important approach to adopt in feminist fairy-tale revisions, the authors must ensure that they are not reinforcing negative gender stereotypes.

Authors who fall prey to gender essentialism in their fairy-tale revisions are the ones who want to express their individuality when decorating their house, but they are so afraid of what the neighbors might think that they make very few noticeable or meaningful changes. They discuss knocking down a wall, but they are worried that doing so would violate the integrity of the architect’s design, so they instead content themselves with painting the walls a pretty color and calling the house new. In reality, the changes these authors make have no real impact on the house or the fairy tale because there is never any true question about whether or not Cinderella

will end up with the prince. There is never substantial doubt that the stepmother and stepsisters are evil. Given the tendency of collectors like Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms to edit the stories they compiled to relate directly to gendered issues of their times, the gender norms to which unsuccessful feminist revisionists knowingly or unknowingly cling include the idea that a female character's primary purpose is to be an object of desire for a male. If this kind of message is still being conveyed in a feminist retelling of a fairy tale, then the revision is not fulfilling its stated purpose of giving a fully transformed perspective of the story.

In addition, creating a feminist revision of a fairy tale that focuses on gender relations is not as simple as rejecting the stereotypes that the gender essentialist embraces. Crowley and Pennington also assert that “[p]owerful feminist fairy tales, ones that are descriptive and self-reflexive, do not seek to simply subvert stereotypes – replace the old with the new; rather, they rattle the foundational cages of the tale where the power structures reside” (304). Therefore, it is conceivable that a successful feminist revision of Cinderella could end with Cinderella marrying the prince. The stereotype that the female protagonist always gets married at the end of the story is not inherently misogynistic; it exists because getting married is a common thing for women to do. It is not the marriage that is the problem. The problem is that in the original tale, no other choice is presented or considered; Cinderella will get married to the prince, but we do not know when. Crowley and Pennington clearly express that making a fairy tale female-centric is not enough to constitute an effective feminist revision; there must be some form of insight that permits the protagonist to question the way her world functions and her role within that world (312). An effective feminist revisionist must understand that giving a female character agency means more than unexpected actions or deviations from the original plot for the sake of girl-power. Agency means that the protagonist has the ability to analyze the world and make effective

choices that will lead her closer to her own personal goals or desires, and the female protagonist must have agency in order to be considered a feminist representation.

Another popular method of feminist fairy-tale revision involves the author giving the female protagonist agency by creating her as a sexually autonomous being. Many authors find this sort of revision necessary because of the feminine sterilization featured in the original tales, most notably in the subsequent editions of the Grimm brothers' *Nursery and Household Tales*. As Tatar explains in her book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales: Expanded Edition*, the Grimm brothers were notorious for their tendency to stray from depictions of pre-marital sex and pregnancy in their revised tales (7-8). According to Tatar, in the original published version of Rapunzel, Rapunzel's godmother only discovers that the girl and the prince are romantically involved when Rapunzel becomes pregnant, and her clothing no longer fits. However, when Wilhelm Grimm edited the text for the next edition, Rapunzel accidentally reveals to her godmother that the prince comes to visit her by comparing the effort it takes to haul her godmother and the prince up the tower (18). The Grimms' revisions remove the realism of human nature from the story; Rapunzel ceases to be an autonomously sexual creature who has sex because she enjoys it (18), and instead becomes a figure of innocent love and piety for young girls to admire.

In addition, Tatar suggests that the edits may not have been wholly the result of Wilhelm Grimm's prudish sensibilities; instead, Tatar indicates that over the years, the Grimms' project of collecting and preserving the German folk lore became less a scholarly pursuit and more of a money-making venture (*The Hard Facts* 11-12). Children were drawn to the Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales*, and in order to protect the book's profit margins, the brothers "openly admitted that they had taken pains to delete 'every phrase unsuitable for children'" and

“expressed the hope that their collection could serve as a ‘manual of manners’” (*Erziehungsbuch* qtd. in Tatar 19). As a result, the females in each story cease to be representations of the everyday woman and are transformed into characters that could serve as role models to young girls and innocent depictions of femininity in the brothers’ culture. Some may believe that such revisions were harmless, especially considering that the readers were primarily children; however, it seems inconsistent that the Grimms felt the need to tone down the sexual aspects of the texts for children, but also included many graphic depictions of physical violence because their young readers found those humorous (21). The revised stories simultaneously glorify physical violence, violence generally being viewed as a masculine trait, and vilify female sexuality, which sends a disturbing message to readers: masculinity is laudable, and femininity is corrupt.

In addition, Tatar notes the Grimms’ refusal to acknowledge how far their revisions deviated from the originals: “Although the brothers insisted that they may have tinkered with the letter but had never tampered with the spirit of the tales...comparisons of successive editions of *Nursery and Household Tales* suggest that the Grimms were either disingenuous, dishonest, or engaging in self-deception when they made such declarations” (24). All in all, the Grimms’ revisions to their collection stripped many of the fairy tales of their true contents, several of which did include (sometimes overt) depictions of female sexuality. In fact, Tatar argues “Wilhelm Grimm rewrote the tales so extensively and went so far ... eliminating off-color episodes that he can be credited with sanitizing folktales” (24). These off-color episodes include moments like Rapunzel’s dalliance with the prince and eventual pregnancy, along with numerous other depictions of females wielding their sexuality freely.

In response to the erasure of female sexuality in the revised tales, some feminist authors

are now taking up the challenge of creating sexually aware fairy-tale females in their revisions who use sex as their primary mode of agency. These characters, who are so often “the fairest of them all” take full advantage of their beauty in order to get what they want, which often includes money, power, or some combination of the two. Rather than being objects for the male characters to covet or win, the female characters are in full control of their sexuality and can use it as a bargaining chip to succeed in a patriarchal society. In her article “Feminism and Fairy Tales,” Karen E. Rowe examines how fairy tales have been altered to suppress female sexuality: she claims that the original tales cause women to “internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy” (239) - namely, getting married and having babies. However, the feminist revisionists who allow their protagonists agency through sexual freedom are trying to subvert this expectation. The primary aspect of many fairy tales that Rowe seems to oppose is the “linkage of sexual awakening with ... [submission] to patriarchal needs” and how the female protagonist “consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage” (246). Rather than sticking to this paradigm, feminist revisionists allow their characters sexual freedom and the ability to choose.

Unfortunately, feminist revisionists still have a great deal of ground to cover when it comes to transforming their female characters from sexualized objects into sexual subjects. In Rowe’s article, she asserts that the common fairy-tale heroine is impotent, almost infantile: “She is unable to act independently or self-assertively; she relies on external agents for rescue; she binds herself first to the father and then the prince; she restricts her ambitions to hearth and nursery” (239). In order to combat this pervasive stereotype, the feminist author must create ambition for the female protagonist – ambition that lies beyond the motive of being loved for beauty and marrying because it is expected of her. Some feminist authors have acknowledged

that as part of their fairy-tale revisions, sex is one of the most powerful weapons in the female protagonist's arsenal, so for the transformed fairy-tale protagonists, sex is no longer a duty reserved for wives. Instead, the women are free to seduce as they please and are allowed to use their sexuality as a tool to achieve their goals.

There are many examples of female characters taking advantage of their sexuality in recent fairy-tale retellings. In Bill Willingham's popular graphic novel series, *Fables*, Snow White's sister, Rose Red, feels intense jealousy when she discovers how wonderful Snow White's life has been in comparison to her own. Rose Red chooses to take revenge on her sister by embarrassing Snow White in court and seducing her husband, Prince Charming (Willingham). Another example of female characters using sexuality for gain occurs in Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles*. In this popular mash-up of numerous classic fairy tales, Queen Levana, the primary antagonist of the story, has the ability to manipulate people's thoughts, and she primarily uses this power to make everyone who sees her believe that she is breathtakingly beautiful. Throughout the first novel, Levana uses a combination of bribery and seduction to convince the emperor to marry her (Meyer). In the 2012 film, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Queen Ravenna reveals to her new husband, the king, that her beauty has caused men to hurt her in the past. She initiates intercourse as a distraction, so she has the opportunity to stab the king in the heart and take over his kingdom (*Snow White and the Huntsman*). However, a noticeable similarity in each of these examples is that the female character that feels most comfortable using sex as a form of power is the antagonist of her story. That is not to say that there are no female protagonists in fairy-tale revisions that enjoy sex and are comfortable with their sexuality – they are simply outnumbered by the antagonists that use sex as a manipulation tool. Female antagonists who are comfortable using their sexuality are common in feminist revisions of fairy tales, but sex is

oftentimes still a taboo subject for the protagonists. Rather than allowing room for the protagonist to explore the activity of sex outside of the context of marriage, many revisionists, whether consciously or otherwise, still cling to the idea of sexual purity being the aspect that virtuously separates the heroine from the villainess. Love and sex are completely separate, despite the fact that “love,” even in the revisionary context, is rarely more than the initial sexual attraction between the female protagonist and the prince. In order to create effective fairy-tale revisions, feminist authors should allow their female characters unapologetic license to examine their sexuality outside of the marriage context, even if that examination does not necessarily include sexual intercourse.

Another form of feminist fairy-tale revision involves giving the female protagonists agency by justifying and sanctioning their use of violence against men. By making the women – who were originally submissive and reliant on others for protection – powerful forces who will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of by men, many feminist authors have created a character trope that features in more than just fairy-tale revisions. However, there is a difference between a physically powerful female protagonist and a vengeful one. In “Vigilante Feminism: Revising Trauma, Abduction, and Assault in American Fairy-Tale Revisions,” Laura Mattoon D’Amore explains that vigilante feminism, specifically, is a trope that many feminist authors have adopted because it addresses the systemic abuse of women in their own stories, rather than focusing on the individual. D’Amore defines vigilante feminism as “vigilantism by girls and women who have undertaken their own protection, and the protection of others, against violence – such as sexual assault, abduction, abuse, and trauma – because they have otherwise been failed in that manner” (387). It seems clear why vigilante feminism is such a popular trope in fairy-tale revisions. So many of the tales include an evil stepmother or regime, the abduction of a beautiful

girl or child by a malevolent entity, and trauma, often in the form of suddenly losing a parent. Indeed, Zipes notes that the pervasiveness of “child abuse and abandonment” in Western fairy tales originates from their prevalence in the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythologies, as well as in their biblical variations (*The Enchanted Screen* 193). It is, therefore, a simple adjustment to have these injustices specifically perpetuated by men in the modern fairy-tale revisions and to have the female characters take vengeful paths in response to their own experiences. Allowing female protagonists in fairy-tale revisions to act as protectors of the weak and as true adversaries to the male characters causes a fascinating shift from the original plotlines. The focus is no longer on adhering to stereotypically female modes of expression; rather, the women have the power they need to “actively [seek] paths of justice that deeply unsettle the structures of power implicit in patriarchy” (D’Amore 390). In a vigilante-feminist revision, agency means the female protagonist can choose to commit violence against the men who have wronged her.

Furthermore, D’Amore acknowledges that vigilante feminism is a product of the idea that individual strength is not the most important aspect of contemporary feminism. Indeed, D’Amore emphasizes the idea that female characters taking up the job of protecting other women by utilizing violence, a stereotypically male attribute, is a direct response to the pervasive rape culture that has permeated Western society (390-91). Two of the examples that she gives of vigilante feminism in her article focus on a character who has experienced physical abuse at the hands of a male character. These female characters then spend the majority of their time hunting down and taking vengeance on the people who hurt them, as well as any other people that the female protagonists perceive as a threat to women (395-6). However, one significant obstacle that vigilante feminism presents as a characterization method in fairy-tale revisions is that it forces the female protagonist to focus all of her attention on perceived threats, who are, more

often than not, men. D'Amore notes that vigilante feminism in these revisions comes as the result of exposure to some kind of trauma, often sexual (393). Rather than moving on and healing from this trauma, these women become fixated on the idea of justice for their sex and create preventative measures that can eliminate future threats. As a result, many of these female figures dedicate their entire lives to facing and challenging the perceived threat, but structuring a revision this way fails to acknowledge a fundamental goal of feminist fairy-tale revision: the female characters should live lives that do not revolve around men. In vigilante feminist revisions, the female protagonist makes an active choice to dedicate all of her time, energy, and mental capacities to confronting threatening men, instead of living a life that is personally fulfilling.

Some may argue that women who take up the noble cause of confronting abusive men are leading fulfilling lives, but no matter how many men the female character tracks down and violently “deals with,” the problem never goes away. The protagonist chooses to spend the rest of her life fighting a battle that she knows intuitively that she will lose. This choice is not realistic in many contexts. In the scope of fairy-tale revisions, where realism is generally questionable, the actions of an effective, fully fleshed out female protagonist must still be realistic. If they are not, then the female character is no longer significant as the focus of a feminist revision. A female character who dedicates her life to eradicating the threat that men pose to women must acknowledge in some way, whether it be through dialogue with another character that asks about her motivations or through mental self-reflection, that she will lose in the end. If an acknowledgement does not occur, the vigilante-feminist revision is less about portraying a character as a realistic woman fighting back against her oppressors and more of a fantasy concocted by feminist revisionists to fulfill the prevalent female desire to hurt men for

the hurt that they have caused and continue to cause, whether personally or systemically.

One thing that many feminist fairy-tale revisionists forget to consider in their revisions is the inherent personhood of the female protagonists. Even though these fairy-tale revisions are meant to acknowledge and eliminate the sexist, stereotypical characterizations of the female characters, many authors get so absorbed in reinventing the story that they forget to give the same amount of attention to their protagonists. When creating a feminist fairy-tale revision, the author cannot use previous iterations of the female characters as a crutch, nor can the author believe that changing merely one aspect of the female's personality is enough to constitute a win for feminist literature. An effective feminist fairy-tale revision is so much more than lauding girl power in a story's mythology or flipping stereotyped gender roles to make the female protagonist edgier or more intense. The true power of feminist fairy-tale revision lies in the attention the author dedicates to constructing the female protagonist. The author is responsible for transforming the female protagonist, the formerly passive victim of circumstance, into a living woman in her story – one with passions and desires and the power to set and achieve her own goals. When authors forget this responsibility, not only do their female fairy-tale protagonists appear unrealistic or unrelatable, but also the authors' works undermine the goal of feminist fairy-tale revision, which is to portray each character as authentic and autonomous, regardless of gender.

***The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as a Revisable American Fairy Tale**

Even though Western-European fairy tales are incredibly popular, they are not the sole focus of feminist revisions. In fact, many authors have made *The Wizard of Oz* series the target of their fairy-tale revisions, while embracing its truly American origins. Although it is true that L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* series does not have the same history of revision as many of

the tales Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms recorded, it is still considered influential to American culture. Indeed, authors like Carol Billman suggest that "[t]he story of Oz unfolds as a drama, through paraphrased action and the dialogue of the characters; Baum presents his story as unobtrusively as did the tellers of the fairy tales" (246). Some may argue that Baum's series is too recent to be compared to the European fairy tales that are so prevalent in Western society, but its recent publication is due in part to its geographical setting: *The Wizard of Oz* is a thoroughly American fairy tale. Given that the United States' beginning is markedly more recent than that of most European countries, it follows that the United States' most popular fairy tale is also recent in comparison. Still, the United States was conceived in 1776, and the fairy-tale genre was largely overlooked by American authors until Baum's publication of his work in 1900. Laura Barret explains in her article "From Wonderland to Wasteland: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Great Gatsby*, and the American Fairy Tale" that in the wake of independence and the subsequent formulation of the American dream, American readers were disinterested in fantasy writing because it paled in comparison to the new American reality, "filled as it was with seemingly unremitting technological invention, geographical expansion, and economic development" (151). Barrett asserts that it was only when Americans began to lose faith in the feasibility of the American dream that fantasy and fairy-tale writing became more popular, and L. Frank Baum was one of the first to take advantage of the rekindled interest in the genre (151). However, *Oz*'s singularity in the publishing world is not the only reason for its popularity. *The Wizard of Oz* is solidly tethered to the United States, with its bleak descriptions of frontier Kansas and the fact that two American citizens, Dorothy of Kansas and Oz of Omaha, Nebraska are inexplicably transported into the magical world. Baum's depiction of Oz as a wonderful land that is just out of reach resonated with the American people, a fact which has encouraged its

longevity and eventual acceptance as the first American fairy tale.

In fact, geographic references are not the only things that make *The Wizard of Oz* series inherently American. Barrett asserts in her article that the Americanness of *The Wizard of Oz* series is due in large part to Baum's seamless integration of both magic and technology into his fairy world (156). Obviously, magic is rampant throughout the series; a land overseen by good and evil witches could not exist without some form of magic. Although his title is "Wizard," Oz's magic is little more than technological know-how mixed with smoke and mirrors. When Dorothy and her companions uncover his true identity in the first book, the Wizard shows the group the various methods he used to convince them of his magical powers, and his devices span from disguises to puppetry to practical effects (Baum 48). And although the group reproaches him for being so deceitful in their initial meetings, they still benefit from his technological prowess: "Rather than being a disappointment, his humanity - and therefore his deception - is a boon. The characters enjoy viewing the mechanism by which they were fooled" (Barrett 168). The benefits that they receive are enough to prevent Dorothy's company from revealing the Wizard's secret, and they allow him to retreat, with all of his knowledge, back to America.

Indeed, because they understand that the Wizard is no more than a man who has made an entire country see him as a great wizard, Dorothy and her friends believe that he also has the power to give them their hearts' desires; in a sense, they allow themselves to be fooled by his ingenuity. Barrett explains, "[T]he tale is as much about the essentially American traits of ingenuity, industry, and tenacity necessary to overcome the natural world" (155). Barrett is referring to Dorothy's success in her various adventures as an example of these American traits, but the Wizard very much falls into this category as well, as a Nebraskan native. In addition to the masquerading in his throne room, the Wizard also makes everyone in the Emerald City

believe that their city is made entirely out of precious gems by having them wear green spectacles that he created (Baum 49). He locks the green glasses on to the citizens' faces to maintain the illusion (31). The Wizard has created an illusory self that, to the denizens of the Emerald City, is magical enough to keep away witches and mighty enough to have an entire city constructed of emerald; the Wizard's dedication to maintaining his image, and the creative ways in which he does so, serve as a testament to his incarnation of the American man. In addition, the Wizard appeals to the economic realities of late-nineteenth century America: everything must come at a price. As Barrett describes him, the Wizard is "an excellent manipulator who relies on Dorothy's American acceptance of the exchange of goods and services as the only reasonable economy" (168). Even when he knows he has no way of fulfilling Dorothy's desire to return home to Kansas, he takes advantage of the economic beliefs that they share as countrymen: the Wizard requires that Dorothy kill the Wicked Witch of the West in exchange for the Wizard returning Dorothy home – a logical exchange of service for service. The Wizard thus gives himself the ability to achieve his own goals, which include a life without fear of malevolent forces more powerful than himself.

Along with the Wizard, Dorothy embodies many of the qualities that were expected of American women in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. For example, as Charles Rzepka explains in his article "'If I can make it there': Oz's Emerald City and the New Woman," American women in this time period were abandoning the traditional lifestyle of staying home and mothering; industrialization and the promise of a better future encouraged many women to leave their rural homes to pursue the American dream through urban occupations (56). Dorothy follows this same pattern, albeit unintentionally, when she flies away from rural Kansas and goes on a quest to the supposedly resplendent Emerald City. This transition from a rural to an urban

setting mirrors the shifting expectations for late nineteenth-century American women; their increased personal and financial independence “was disturbing traditional notions of a woman’s ‘proper’ relationship to men and marriage” (56). Dorothy is only a child in the *Oz* series, and her behavior towards the men that she encounters is certainly far from traditional. Each of her three travelling companions is male, yet Dorothy acts as the leader of the company throughout their quest. In addition, she is irreverent towards the Wizard, even before discovering his deception. When he tells her to kill the Wicked Witch of the West, she responds, “If you, who are Great and Terrible, cannot kill her yourself, how do you expect me to do it?” (Baum 34). There is no blind adherence to authority, such as readers might expect from a little girl during the nineteenth century. And after the Wizard’s deception is revealed, Dorothy becomes even more bold by telling him, “I think you are a very bad man” (50). Dorothy is shockingly straightforward and honest in her interactions with the Wizard, so much so that Rzepka asserts, “Baum watered down much of the delightful matter-of-factness and unselfconscious courage of his heroine in later *Oz* books, as though shocked ... by the unladylike qualities of his own creation” (60). However unladylike Dorothy may seem, she confronts her destiny with steadfast determination, which makes her a quintessentially American figure.

It is also important to note that Dorothy displays a great amount of courage as she overcomes the numerous obstacles on her journey, as her determination to achieve her goal was quite a celebrated American trait in that time. For example, when she first encounters the Cowardly Lion, he behaves like a vicious beast and tries to harm her companions. Rather than running away, Dorothy charges at the Lion, slaps him in the face, and then berates him for being so rude (Baum 18). In addition, when the group encounters dangerous situations, like crossing a river on a rickety fallen tree, Dorothy is brave enough to go first, and she always makes sure that

Toto is safely travelling with her (21). Finally, when the Wicked Witch of the West steals one of Dorothy's shoes, she becomes so angry that she shouts at the witch, and eventually assaults her with a pail of water (41). Edward W. Hudlin explains in his "The Mythology of 'Oz': An Interpretation," that "The fact that Oz is uncivilized is important, for it prepares the reader for the immoral actions of Oz's inhabitants" (451). It also prepares the reader for Dorothy's actions, which, although they adhere to the American ideals of facing problems and discovering creative solutions, appear uncivilized when viewed through the lens of her being a little girl, in the same way that nineteenth-century American women shunning their families' traditional ways of life was unnatural.

As well as being a wonderful fairy tale, L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series is well-suited for feminist revision, particularly because so many of the books lightly touch on concerns that feminism has been exploring for a long time. In addition, many of the characters are only present for part of one or two books, which means, particularly in a children's story, there is not much time to flesh out or deeply characterize many of the figures who appear in the tale. Therefore, a feminist revision of this fairy tale would allow for further characterization and exploration of the feminist themes already latent in the initial works. Although some may question whether Baum intentionally instilled his books with feminist ideas, Keira V. Williams explains in her article "From Oz to Amazon Island: The Popular Evolution of American Matriarchalism" that Baum was a vocal feminist who was influenced by the ideas of many of the women in his life (1003). One woman he shared a close relationship with was his mother-in-law, Matilda Joslyn Gage, who was a prominent suffragist and author of the feminist work *Women, Church and State* (1005-6, 1008). Williams explains that in this book, Gage gives a historical account of matriarchalism in the world, which is "a constellation of ideas about the history and nature of

female power, based upon the initial premise that human societies were originally, universally matriarchal” (1003). Indeed, the Iroquois Nations practiced matriarchalism extensively, and researcher Lewis Henry Morgan observed that life in the Seneca tribes revolved around the “matrilineal inheritance of property and power” (1005). America’s indigenous background in matriarchalism and Baum’s close relationship with his feminist mother-in-law set the stage for the manner in which the first American fairy tale emphasizes female dominion.

As a result of his close relationship with Gage, Baum created Oz, a magical land that is inescapably matriarchal, both in origin and in leadership as the series goes on. In his *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, Zipes describes Oz as “a specific American utopia ... and as such it embodies that which is missing, lacking, absent in America. Oz is the counterpart to the reality of America, a possibility that has never been realized” (138). As a matriarchal society, Oz contrasts with America by revealing the inherent merits of female leadership over a male regime. As Baum explains in *The Tin Woodman of Oz*, the land of Oz initially becomes a wonderful fairy country because a fairy queen, Queen Lurline, passes over and enchants the land, and she leaves one of her fairies to rule it when she leaves (920). Then, after Ozma Tippetarius regains her throne, Baum explains that she is lovely because she is “[b]orn of a long line of Fairy Queens” (710). In addition, each male ruler that Baum portrays is inefficient or incapable. For example, in *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, Glinda explains that the Wizard only achieves power because he steals the throne from Pastorius, a male king (132). However, we are aware that the Wizard has no true power but trickery – the fact that he is able to depose a king who has virtually unlimited resources is rather telling about Pastorius’ effectiveness. In an alternate version of this history – Baum’s work contains many inconsistent timelines – the evil witch Mombi is able to capture and imprison Ozma’s grandfather while he is out hunting, and Mombi also later imprisons Ozma’s

father, Pastorius (*Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* 269). In addition, Williams suggests that the Wizard we meet in the first book of the series “is the most obvious representation of pure patriarchy,” yet the protagonists understand Oz is a powerless conman by the end of the story (1008). Each of these male leaders is helpless in the end, while the female rulers are powerful and beloved.

Baum also populates this land of Oz with powerful female witches, and their moral alignments are straightforward in their presentations – the author provides them with the title Wicked or Good. This distinction of witch-types contradicts the portrayal of all witches as “one-dimensionally evil” that Zipes notes as common in many dominant cultural versions of fairy tales; rather than acknowledging the fluid nature of such magical beings in the literary tradition, popular media oftentimes reduces the witch to the villain role, without any acknowledgement of witches’ varied historical representations (“Witch as Fairy/Fairy as Witch” 75). However, Baum’s depictions of the wicked witches are reminiscent of Gage’s historical viewpoint toward accused witches. In *Women, Church and State*, Gage claims, “[T]he witch was in reality the profoundest thinker, the most advanced scientists of those ages” (243). It follows that the Wizard in Baum’s story acknowledges that he lives in fear of the witches of Oz because he knows they are the only ones with the power to destroy him (Baum 49). In addition, Williams notes the wicked witches are portrayed as “threats to equality” because each one in the series owns and abuses slaves (1008). Wickedness is an undesirable trait, and those who possess wickedness in their hearts are subsequently overcome in each narrative. On the other hand, Williams asserts that the good witches represent the matriarchal origins of society, which is why they only use their powers to save and protect Oz (1008). These powerful witches, along with their sorceress ruler, Ozma, ensure that the people of Oz are able to live in relative peace and tranquility, with

their primary adversaries coming from other lands.

Another feminist subject that the original *Oz* series explores is that of gender. More specifically, *The Marvelous Land of Oz* discusses whether biology or personality is what defines someone as a person. One aspect that distinguishes the genders in this series is physicality; as Stuart Culver notes in his “Growing Up in Oz,” one distinct characteristic of the male characters in the *Oz* series is that many of the important ones are inhuman, while the important female characters are all flesh and blood (619). However, the primary exception to this characterization is Tip, the male protagonist of *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. At the end of the novel, when Tip and his companions speak to the witch, Mombi, they discover that Tip was born as Princess Ozma, but the witch transformed her into a boy to hide him so the Wizard could seize control of Oz (Baum 140-41). After the characters discover this falsehood, they transform Tip back into Ozma, a female (141). However, Ozma claims that no significant change has taken place: “I hope none of you will care less for me than you did before. I’m just the same Tip, you know” (Baum 141). Despite having gone through this grand transformation, Tip/Ozma is the same person and wants to be treated as she was when she was travelling as a male with her companions. Culver notes, “If her identity...remains fundamentally unchanged across different – and differently gendered – bodies, then it cannot be understood as something reducible to or even significantly limited by her peculiar physiology” (623). This is a significant distinction drawn between gender and biology, and certainly one that was uncommon in children’s literature at the time: the notion that gender does not control a person’s identity.

Through this transformation, Baum conveys to his audience that Ozma’s personhood is more significant than her gender. Tip is not transformed into Ozma because he is particularly girl-ish in any way; rather, he is under an enchantment, and restoring his “proper form,” the

female form, is necessary (Baum 141). As previously discussed, the cultural understanding of the American woman was shifting during the late nineteenth century; it was more common for women to leave home to find work and financial independence, despite their families' protestations. As a result, "Baum's fairy tale offers its reader a compromise, a way of growing into a proper young woman while yet regarding her gender as something other than an inescapable biological limit" (Culver 608). Ozma's new biology does not tether her, nor does her sex change automatically make her a woman. Butler states that there is no "category of 'women' that simply needs to be filled in with various components...in order to become complete" (20-1). Ozma does not have to begin changing who she is just to fit in with her new body. While she does adopt several feminine behaviors as the series progresses, her internal self does not change; she becomes a woman when she decides to, not because of the transformation.

While Baum does an interesting job of addressing serious feminist topics in his *Oz* series, the genre does not leave a lot of room for expansion on these ideas; unlike the many Western-European fairy tales that Anderson, Perrault, and the Grimms popularized, the *Oz* series' intended audience was children. And while the female protagonist, Dorothy, does have some form of agency – as much as a young girl can have in a strange world – the Wicked Witch of the West does not. There is no explanation of her wickedness, nor is any other reason initially given for the Wizard's desire to see her dead. The only reasoning for the Witch's attacks on Dorothy is "the Wicked Witch was angry to find them in her country" (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* 37). As the primary antagonist of the story, the Wicked Witch is one-dimensional at best, and she only appears in person in one chapter of the book. The Wizard, who is a charlatan and liar, has a great deal of backstory, which makes him somewhat sympathetic to the readers, yet for some unknown reason, the Wicked Witch does not receive the same courtesy. The Wicked Witch truly does not

possess agency – she is evil for the sake of moving the plot forward, but not for any reasons of her own.

As a feminist fairy-tale revision, Maguire's *Wicked* works to fill in the gaps in the Witch's characterization. Rather than leaving the Witch as a one-dimensional plot device, Maguire reimagines the character altogether and creates Elphaba – the green-skinned bookworm who evolves into a political activist, dead set on social reform in Oz. Maguire expands on the feminist concepts that Baum included in his original series by interweaving them into Elphaba's Oz. Elphaba not only struggles to analyze and accept her gender identity, but also to fight the country's stigma against women who pursue education while utilizing violence to achieve her goals. Altogether, Elphaba's characterization in *Wicked* far surpasses that of the Wicked Witch of the West in Baum's original series, not because Maguire's characterization engenders sympathy for Elphaba, but because the depiction is realistic. Each time Elphaba encounters a challenge in her story, she reacts in a way that directly reflects her experiences up to that point in her life. No choice she makes is arbitrary, and each of her choices leads her closer to her demise. Maguire depicts Elphaba as a real woman, one who is flawed and makes many terrible decisions, but those decisions are her decisions to make. As a female fairy-tale character, Elphaba possesses the same agency as any real woman – the kind of agency all female characters deserve in their depictions – and this agency is what makes *Wicked* an effective feminist revision.

Chapter Two – Choosing Gender and Spiting Sex

Throughout *Wicked*, Gregory Maguire explores what makes a person a woman by giving his protagonist, Elphaba Thropp, a complicated relationship with her own gender identity. In Elphaba's Oz, biological sex serves as both a source of division and a source of power. Elphaba is born into a newly patriarchal society, and she has certain expectations placed upon her to behave in a manner that is distinctly feminine because she is biologically female. Yet Elphaba's actions consistently deviate from these expectations of femininity, and she is consequently shunned and scorned by both her peers and authority figures. As a result, she turns to isolation and anonymity, which allows her to live without fear of repercussions or judgement. Maguire allows Elphaba to explore her gender identity by giving her the agency to push back against the societal pressures that try to force her to be someone she is not, which is a freedom that many fairy-tale females do not possess.

Maguire begins his exploration into Elphaba's gender identity on the first page of the novel. As she observes Dorothy and her companions resting and gossiping about her on the Yellow Brick Road, the Witch hears the Tin Woodman loudly proclaim, "She was castrated at birth ... She was born hermaphroditic, or maybe entirely male" (1). The idea that Elphaba is not wholly woman in the eyes of her detractors demonstrates how, in their minds, her deviation from Oz's cultural expectations of gendered behavior is directly tied to her physical biology: the Witch's inherent wickedness can be attributed to her incomplete nature, as she allegedly lives in a female body with the mind and mannerisms of a man. However, Maguire shows that Elphaba is born undeniably female although there is initially some confusion between the midwives. When trying to determine the baby's sex, the midwives have to clean the blood and discharge off Elphaba several times before they can confirm that she does not have a penis (20). Although the

initial confusion adds suspense to the reveal, Maguire confirms that his protagonist is unquestionably female, no matter what rumors may say.

In fact, Maguire's revision suggests that female characters should wield agency over their bodies from the outset of their lives. The first person to suggest that Elphaba has this agency is Nanny, a nursemaid to the Thropp family: "Perhaps ... little green Elphaba chose her own sex, her own color, and to hell with her parents" (31). As Nanny notes, Elphaba's parents, Melena and Frex, are both convinced that their first child will be a boy. They even refer to her as "he" throughout Melena's pregnancy. Frex, however, descends from a long line of male ministers and desires a son to carry on the godly calling of his lineage. In addition, Melena is next in line to inherit the ruling title of Eminence in Munchkinland. She does not wish to have a daughter because this title descends matrilineally through the Thropp family. Melena knows the title ties the inheritor to the ruling seat in Colwen Grounds, and it is one that Melena tries to avoid by marrying Frex and moving into the country (299). Melena hopes that by having a boy, her child will be spared from inheriting the title. Nevertheless, Elphaba is born female and dashes both her parents' hopes. However, the idea that Elphaba's agency extends so far backwards that she may have been able to choose to be born female sets a great precedent for fairy-tale revisions. Choosing femaleness can be preferable and desirable, even when others choose to shame or reject its inherent worth.

In fact, femaleness is preferable in the Oz that Elphaba is born into. Just as the Eminence title is passed matrilineally, so too is the throne of Oz: ever since the Fairy Queen Lurline appointed her daughter to rule the land, the title of Ozma passes from mother to daughter, along with the queenship (42). It is only when the Wizard arrives in Oz and murders the Regent that Oz transforms into a largely patriarchal society, in which harsh distinctions are drawn between the

sexes (148). Whereas Baum slowly reveals this creation myth in the sequels of the *Oz* series, Maguire presents it all at once, and relatively early in the novel. Crowley and Pennington explain that adding a female-centered mythologic backdrop to a fairy-tale revision does not necessarily make it different from the original or particularly feministic, especially if the mythology has little to no impact on the story's outcome (306). However, by immediately including the creation myth that Baum teased out over several books, Maguire alters the original narrative of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. He establishes Oz as a matriarchy outright, a political system that any woman would be fortunate to be born into, and the Wizard as an agent of evil who comes to take that birthright away from the protagonist. As an agent of evil, or an agent of a distinctly eighteenth-century American identity, the Wizard then transforms Oz's political structure into a patriarchal regime. In this regime, women become subject to power-encroachments previously unheard of in Oz. These violations include educational segregation of the sexes, which dismisses female students to the inferior schools (65). Another violation takes place when the regime attempts to force the female protagonists into clandestine work for the new, male-centered government (159). As the central authority in the novel, the Wizard and his regime rob the women of Oz of their agency; the men gain power and influence in the patriarchal society, and the women of Oz must find ways to conform within the new empire.

As she grows older, Elphaba still identifies as a female, but she does not allow her biology to unduly influence her personality. It is clear when she enters college that Elphaba's peers largely adhere to the more feminine expectations of dress and social interactions of Oz, from which Elphaba abstains; this contrast becomes especially prominent when she becomes roommates with the hyperfeminine Galinda. When the two girls share a dorm, Galinda views the pairing as unacceptable because of Elphaba's lack of feminine qualities, not to mention her

greenness. She then tries to avoid further association with Elphaba by cultivating relationships with “the better girls” in the dorm (74). Indeed, these girls frequently shame Elphaba for her masculine tendencies and aversion to ornamentation (75, 82). What makes Galinda believe these girls are “better” than Elphaba is not their personalities or their levels of intelligence – it is their willingness to adhere to the stereotypically feminine behaviors that Galinda herself prizes. Butler explains that gender is distinct from biological sex – it is a series of acts that must be repeated to avoid cultural reproach (177-78). Merely because Elphaba is female does not mean that she is accepted as a woman by her peers. She chooses not to repeat the acts that her schoolmates associate with femininity and womanhood, so Elphaba becomes a pariah who is only acknowledged for amusement or for bringing shame on her roommate. Indeed, friendly association with Elphaba is so undesirable that its mere suggestion brings Galinda to tears (Maguire 122). Yet Elphaba has the willpower to not be swayed by peer pressure, and she does not embrace Oz’s culturally reinforced forms of femininity to make the other girls around her more comfortable. As such, she possesses a power that the other students at Crage Hall could not fathom – she does not care about what others think of her, and in that social apathy, she gains true freedom.

Although some may argue that Elphaba’s failure to practice traditional forms of femininity results from her upbringing or social class, Maguire’s novel demonstrates that Elphaba’s deviation from the culture’s expected gender roles is a definitive choice. The schoolmates who gossip about Elphaba suggest that her ragged wardrobe is as a result of a religious calling, as her father is a poor missionary to the Quadling people (75). However, Elphaba’s younger sister, Nessarose, dresses quite elegantly when she comes to Shiz. In fact, Glinda (formerly Galinda) notes with some shock that the two girls look as though they belong to

different families (132). It is not that Elphaba cannot afford fine clothing – she is the heiress to the seat of power in Munchkinland, so she does have access to wealth and finery. Elphaba dislikes pomp and frills, and she chooses to wear plain clothing because she feels comfortable in it. Nevertheless, when Galinda tries to force some semblance of femininity onto Elphaba in the form of a “super-feminine [hat] boys in a pantomime wore when they pretended to be girls,” they are both surprised to discover that she is beautiful, albeit in an unconventional way: Galinda thinks Elphaba’s beauty is “unrefined, but not in a social sense – more in a sense of nature not having done its full job with Elphaba, not quite having managed to make her enough like herself” (78). Galinda’s confusion about Elphaba’s hidden beauty is best explained by Butler’s concept of gender identity: “[B]ecause certain kinds of ‘gender identities’ fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities within that domain” (24). Galinda sees Elphaba as a creature that is incomplete because it is the only way that Galinda can comprehend a female choosing not to act like her, as she perceives herself as a pinnacle of her culture’s feminine ideals.

Rather than accepting Elphaba as a person with different preferences and modes of expression, Galinda views her as abnormal. As a result, she feels little guilt over feigning a familiarity with Elphaba to amuse her friends. Just after Galinda and Elphaba have their first substantive conversation about religion, one that Elphaba clearly enjoys, Galinda uses her roommate’s words and looks to tease Elphaba and ingratiate herself to the popular crowd: “She did nothing but chatter about evil ... And girls, when she tried on my hat ... She looked like somebody’s maiden aunt come up out of the grave, I mean as frumpy as a Cow” (82). Not only does Galinda attack Elphaba’s unfeminine appearance, but she does so by comparing her roommate to an Animal; an Animal is a creature who possesses a spirit and the power of speech

in Maguire's Oz but is still regarded as a second-class citizen. To be a female and unfeminine is unthinkable to Galinda, so Elphaba must be something other. Nevertheless, Elphaba resists the societal pressure that demands that she behave like Galinda.

As a result, the friendship she cultivates with Galinda towards the end of their college years is more substantial than Galinda's relationships with the "better" girls. Elphaba and Galinda's friendship allows room for deviation from cultural gender norms, rather than strict adherence to them. Like many students at Crag Hall, Galinda primarily spends time with other girls in her first year at the female-only university, but her friendship with Elphaba broadens her horizons; when they spend time together, they often explore the city without a chaperone, and they establish a social circle that includes several men (147). Given Elphaba's disdain for gender-specific expectations for behavior, her involvement in such activities is unsurprising. However, Galinda's friendship with Elphaba is significant because it reveals that deviation from societal gender norms does not make Galinda any less of a woman.

Her transformation from Galinda to Glinda does not represent a loss of femininity, but an acceptance of the Other that she believes Elphaba embodies, which is a blend of masculine and feminine behaviors that are not exclusive to biological sex. As evidence of this, Galinda only adopts the name Glinda after Doctor Dillamond's murder. Dillamond is a professor and Animal who constantly mispronounces Galinda's name, and she adopts his mispronunciation as her moniker "out of some belated apology for her initial rudeness to the martyred Goat" (130). By adopting the Goat's epithet for herself, Glinda aligns herself with the Other she believes Elphaba represents, and that is how the girls' friendship is able to flourish. Instead of forcing Elphaba to conform to Oz's expectations for female behavior, Glinda is able to foster a friendship with the girl when she stops viewing Elphaba's choices and rejection of feminine behavior as abnormal

and begins viewing them as aspects of her personality. In fact, Maguire's emphasis on female individuality and acceptance in his fairy-tale revision follows a trend seen in early nineteenth century German writings – when German writers were protesting governmental censors, they revised fairy tales to show “a new world had to be ... where the creative nature of all human beings is allowed full development and where differences between people are cultivated and respected” (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 42). Maguire portrays multi-faceted fairy-tale females who learn to accept each other as they are, even when who they are is not who society claims they should be.

Indeed, Maguire's characterization of Elphaba as a well-rounded woman is realistic because he does not force his female fairy-tale protagonist to reject all aspects of femininity outright. Instead, Maguire reveals complexity in Elphaba's relationship with her gender identity. He does not constrain her to a purely anti-feminine modes of behavior, nor does he shame her for accepting and desiring some forms of femininity, even when others might. For example, one form of femininity that Elphaba chooses to accept is one that is kept from her. The shoes that Frex sends to Nessarose, the ones that would become the ruby slippers in the 1939 film version of Baum's first book, are beautiful and stereotypically feminine, so much so that every female in the room gasps at their beauty when they are revealed (150). Elphaba is obviously jealous of the gift. As the shoes are a significant symbol in Baum's original *Oz* series, Maguire making them unattainable to Elphaba throughout her life is significant. The shoes are a symbol of traditional femininity; Elphaba desires to possess them, but they are constantly held out of her reach, and she pursues them until her untimely end (400). Despite her aversion to many attributes of femininity, she acknowledges that her masculine behavioral tendencies cause people to treat her differently: “I know I am not traditionally presented ... but I believe on the grounds of being a

girl I am excluded from the Briscoe Hall library” (111). By emphasizing both her masculine manners and biological sex, Elphaba attempts to unify her disparate identities.

However, many characters question Elphaba’s desires because they are accustomed to the confidence she exudes in her gender-nonconformity. For example, when Nessarose notes her sister’s jealousy over their father’s gift, she justifies his decision to send a gift only to her by bringing up Elphaba’s past predilections: “Don’t ruin my small happiness with resentment, will you? He knows you don’t need this kind of thing” (150). In addition, when Elphaba confronts Glinda about giving the shoes to Dorothy, Glinda’s responds, “Come on, Elphie, since when have you cared about shoes, of all things? Look at those army boots you have on!” (346). These women make assumptions about Elphaba’s desires, based on their perceptions of her outward appearance, rather than any full understanding of her inner turmoil. Elphaba’s plight is strikingly similar to that of Herculine. According to Butler, Herculine was a hermaphroditic person who grew up identifying as a female but was legally required to act and dress like a man when s/he became an adult. Herculine’s gender confusion resulted in a sort of “metaphysical homelessness” because he/r gender identity and anatomy were disparate parts (124). Elphaba also experiences this “metaphysical homelessness” (124) because she is excluded from male society due to her female anatomy, and she is excluded from female society due to her masculine behavioral tendencies. Elphaba’s own words in the midst of a breakdown prove that she feels excluded from all forms of categorization: “[N]o, no ... I’m not a woman, I’m not a person, no” (191). For Elphaba, the shoes are a form of public justification of her choices – if she possesses Nessarose’s shoes, the ultimate symbol of femininity, then she can no longer be ostracized by her female contemporaries or treated as less than a woman.

Another way *Wicked* proves itself as an effective fairy-tale revision comes from Maguire

allowing his protagonist to explore the influence both her gender identity and sexuality have on each other. Rather than shying away from the topic of sex, as most female fairy-tale protagonists are wont to do, Elphaba carries on an affair with Fiyero, a married man and old friend from Shiz University. Rowe suggests in her article that romance is a tool that fairy-tale authors often use to soften the fact that their female protagonists have no real agency – there is a hero to do all the work, so there is no need for the heroine to do anything but be beautiful and loved (239).

However, the romance that Maguire fashions between Elphaba and Fiyero does not operate on the basis of this principle. Not only does Elphaba possess an independent life outside of their relationship, but she is the one who initiates sexual contact with Fiyero: “[H]er arms wheeled of their own accord ... not to kill him, but to pin him with love, to mount him against the wall” (191). In addition, she does not stroke Fiyero’s ego by assuring him that he is the first man she has been with. She is honest and forthright about her past when she says, “You think all this is new to me ... You think I am such a virgin” (192). Elphaba’s lack of sexual inhibitions and references to a life separate from Fiyero indicates a level of modern sexual confidence that most female fairy-tale protagonists do not usually display.

In truth, this kind of behavior is staunchly different than what is expected from the women of Oz. For example, Glinda, ever the symbol of Oz’s femininity, gets married quite quickly after she finishes school. Glinda follows the classic fairy-tale storyline that Rowe describes for typical female characters because she revokes her independent status in favor of becoming an accessory to her husband (246). In fact, Glinda strongly implies that her marriage is one of convenience, seeing as the only description she provides of Sir Chuffrey is “holder of the most useless title and the biggest stock portfolio in the Perth Hills” (Maguire 209). She submits to Oz’s patriarchal expectations for women to be secondary to and rely on men, and she is

rewarded for this submission with “more money than [she] can give away” (341). Conversely, Elphaba is determined to never be Fiyero’s possession. She sets clear limits on how often he can come to visit, particularly so his visitations will not interfere with her goals: “There were long days in a row when they couldn’t meet. ‘I have business, I have work, trust me or I shall disappear on you’” (191). By making it clear that Fiyero is a secondary entity in her life, Elphaba ignores the gendered expectation that women should cling to men and allow themselves to be consumed by their male partner.

Clearly, Elphaba has the agency to do what she wants with her body – she does not accept any cultural authority that would tell her that doing so is wrong or immoral. Elphaba is a member of an Emerald City terrorist cell, and she eventually reveals to Fiyero that her cell’s ultimate goal is to assassinate the Wizard (206). Throughout their relationship, Fiyero tries to elicit more information about the work that she does, but she cleverly evades his questioning. She utilizes distinctly feminine techniques to distract Fiyero from her more masculine pursuits. For example, when Fiyero asks why Elphaba lives alone in an abandoned corn-exchange, she diverts his attention by reminiscing about their school days and appeals to his vanity by calling his tattoos beautiful (189). Later, when the two of them argue about the ethics of her work, which she acknowledges does involve hurting people, she attempts to distract him from their disagreement with sex (200). Finally, when he interrogates her about who she works for, Elphaba beckons him to “[o]il her breasts” (206), which even Fiyero acknowledges as her purposefully changing the subject. Despite his objections to her methods, Elphaba is able to successfully prevent Fiyero from uncovering her secrets, and she does so by using sex as a mechanism of distraction. Unlike many female protagonists in fairy-tale revisions, Elphaba wields her sexuality as a tool, but it is not one that hurts her partner.

It is only after Fiyero is murdered that Elphaba begins to display primarily feminine traits, but even these are not performed according to Oz's ideal of female behavior. Rather than moving on and finding some other man to seduce or marry for purposes of stability, Elphaba temporarily abandons her political pursuits and joins a cloister. The cloister of Saint Glinda is an entirely female order, ruled over by the Superior Maunt, rather than any male priest. In this order, Elphaba's work, while still feminine in practice, is distinctly different from the sorts of work that the typical women of Oz perform. As symbolic wives of the Unnamed God, the maunts of the cloister have no need to strive for the sort of femininity that Glinda embodies – the flashy, materialistic femininity that aims to please men. Instead, the maunts display stereotypically feminine behaviors through their fastidious housekeeping, cooking, hospitality, and care for the grievously ill.

However, Elphaba also refuses to fully conform to the maunts' expected behaviors. While she is a hard worker and does as she is bid, she does not form any religious attachments. In addition, she refrains from speaking at all for three years, so she does not gossip or form any significant relationships with the other maunts (227). As a result, she is not a treasured member of the sisterhood, and it is the Superior Maunt who decides that it is "time for [Elphaba] to go and atone for her mistakes, though not even the Superior Maunt knew what they were" (228). Elphaba is effectively dismissed from the cloister, a sanctuary for lost women, because she chooses not to fully integrate herself into the lifestyle of a maunt. Elphaba's dismissal from this female haven is an example of a hardship that female protagonists can experience when they have the freedom to choose their own paths. Oftentimes, the choice to remain true to herself makes Elphaba's life far more difficult.

Similar to how Maguire does not shy away from portraying his female protagonist's

sexual encounters, he does not omit the consequences of those encounters. Another way that Elphaba's story deviates from the standard fairy-tale revision is that she becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Elphaba performs the most quintessentially female act when she gives birth, but her complicated relationship with gender identity causes her to reject her new status as a mother. Giving birth puts her at cross-purposes with the expectations for the women of Oz. Women like Galinda, who fully embrace Oz's standards of femininity, would scorn Elphaba for having a child out of wedlock because she fulfills a role that they consider as exclusive to wives. In these women's opinions, since Elphaba and Fiyero never married, it is inappropriate for her to bear his child. On the other hand, the maunts of the cloister reject motherhood on principle, so Elphaba's status as a mother alienates her further from their ranks. In fact, when the Vinkus trail guide, Oatsie Manglehand, takes Elphaba on as a passenger from the cloister, she notes that the Superior Maunt pays "more than ... the whole rest of her party combined" to take the woman away (225). However, when Oatsie discovers that Liir, a little boy, is going to be accompanying Elphaba, she "began to understand why the payment to take the green maunt away had been more than generous" (225). The maunts choose to live lives of celibacy in service to the Unnamed God, and they have little tolerance for women who cannot fully commit themselves to work in the cloister. While it is easy for the maunts to take care of Liir when he is a baby, a growing boy has no place in a cloister, and it is clear that Elphaba has no intention of taking care of him. Elphaba retains her independence, even when motherhood is thrust upon her, and she does not pretend that she is pleased with the results of her affair.

While some feminist revisionists might feel compelled to portray childbirth as a feminine awakening for their protagonists, Maguire does not feel the need to completely reconstruct Elphaba's personality to make her a good mother. Elphaba never expresses any desire for

children, and birthing one has done little to change her mind about them. She does not automatically become a maternal figure after childbirth – in fact, Elphaba pays no attention to Liir for the first seven years of his life (291). Instead, she removes herself from the experience altogether. For example, after Elphaba and Liir have established themselves at the Vinkus stronghold of Kiamo Ko with Fiyero’s family, Nanny comes to stay with them. When Nanny asks outright if Liir is Elphaba’s son, Elphaba says, “It is not a question I can answer” (291). Obviously, Elphaba’s confusion frustrates Nanny; Nanny has been a nursemaid for the Thropp family for generations, and it is part of her job to keep track of how the lineage for Eminence is maintained. However, Elphaba mentally blocks out both her pregnancy and delivery, claiming that she was practically comatose after Fiyero’s murder: “It’s just possible I brought a child to term and delivered it ... I have no motherly warmth toward the boy ... and I don’t feel as if I’ve ever gone through the experience of bearing a child” (291). In bearing a child, Elphaba performs the ultimate female act and fulfills what Rowe refers to as the “‘real’ sexual function” of a woman living within a patriarchal society (239). However, her adherence to this female function falls outside of the parameters of appropriate female behavior – Elphaba has a child with a married man and refuses to mother it. Through her refusal to accept responsibility for Liir during his childhood, Elphaba fully displays her disregard for the enforced structure of heteronormative behaviors; she does not feel compelled by outside forces to treat her own child differently than she would any other child – that is to say, with indifference.

Maguire emphasizes that Elphaba’s lackadaisical mothering is atypical of Ozian women by directly contrasting her parenting of Liir with Sarima’s interactions with her own children. Sarima is the widowed wife of Fiyero, and her children are Irji, Manek, and Nor. Sarima treasures her children both as remnants of her late husband and as the future leaders of the Arjiki

people. While Elphaba initially rejects motherhood and refuses to accept the feminine role of caretaker, Sarima leans into and prolongs the role because it is all that remains of her marriage. As a mother, Sarima dotes on her children, perhaps to the point of spoiling them. Her daughter, Nor, is a nine-year-old who still sucks her thumb and begs her mother for bedtime stories every night (246). She keeps the boys, Irji and Manek, confined to the castle and does not allow them to participate in the traditional tribal migrations, nor be around men at all: “[T]hey both might have their throats slit – there were too many clansmen to claim leadership for themselves or their sons” (246). As a result of their overbearing mother’s attention, Sarima’s children are difficult to manage, particularly because they are unaccustomed to punishment. When Elphaba suggests that Sarima send the children to school, Sarima vehemently refuses, saying that it is too dangerous to send them alone (276). Indeed, when Elphaba begins critiquing Sarima’s parenting and saying that her children are disobedient and rude, Sarima responds by asking, “Well, how do you judge Liir in this regard, then?” (277). Rather than allowing her femininity and effectiveness as a mother to be challenged, Sarima points out that while her mothering might not be perfect, at least she is trying – the same cannot be said of Elphaba.

Under Elphaba’s neglectful parenting, Liir grows into a shy, self-conscious boy who desperately clings to any person who shows him affection. Indeed, when Nanny begins mothering Liir in Elphaba’s stead, “Elphaba registered it with shame, for she also saw how willingly Liir responded to Nanny’s attention” (292). It is significant that Elphaba feels shame at her ineptitude as a mother; she knows that she should possess a biologically female imperative to be maternal to her offspring. However, Elphaba is someone who has spent the majority of her life renouncing the behaviors that define her sex, so it is quite difficult for her when she recognizes that her inexperience with feminine conduct affects more than just herself. She feels

pressure from the primarily feminine presences around her to conform to the patriarchal ideal of loving mother, but Elphaba cannot bring herself to do so. She fails as a mother, and foists the care of Liir off onto Sarima and her sisters – eventually, Liir begins calling Elphaba Auntie Witch, just like Sarima’s children. As a female with unconstrained control over her actions, Elphaba is free to choose what kind of mother that she wants to be, and she chooses not to be one to Liir.

However, Elphaba does not reject motherhood in its entirety. In fact, she acts the most loving to children and creatures that are not of her blood. Unlike traditional motherhood, Elphaba’s mothering rarely extends beyond self-interested motives, and the maternal actions she portrays are often the result of need or guilt. The first example of Elphaba’s maternal bond with a surrogate child is her relationship with Chistery. Chistery is a snow monkey, one that Elphaba saves from being eaten when it is only an infant (242). When Elphaba sees that the baby monkey is in danger, she runs to rescue it, even though she is separated from the baby by a lake. Running to protect the monkey is an inherently selfless act, particularly because Elphaba assumes that she will be grievously injured if the lake water touches her skin. In addition, Elphaba becomes quite protective of Chistery, particularly around Sarima’s family members. For example, when Chistery escapes Elphaba’s room at Kiamo Ko and begins causing havoc in the kitchen, Sarima’s sisters do what they can to try to capture him. However, when Elphaba discovers this, she harshly reprimands the sisters: “You’re white with rage at this poor beast! ... Don’t you ever lay a hand on this monkey, do you hear me?” (257). Elphaba has more compassion for her monkey than she does for her son, choosing to spend the majority of her time tending to it instead of Liir.

Elphaba also demonstrates her preference for Chistery through the time she dedicates to teaching him. Although Elphaba does not make any effort to educate Liir in any way, she spends

countless hours trying to teach Chistery to speak. The children watch her one day as she encourages Chistery: “There is no difference ... Remember how to speak, Chistery. You are an animal, but Animal is your cousin, damn you. Say *spirit*” (269). Through this interaction, Elphaba reveals that raising Chistery is a wholly selfish endeavor. She does not care for the monkey as a creature, but as an idea. By teaching Chistery to speak, Elphaba is trying to legitimize the research that she was assisting Dr. Dillamond with before his murder. This research involves determining the inherent differences between people, Animals, and animals, and the goal of it is to prove that there is no basis for the Wizard’s mistreatment of Animals in Oz. Raising and teaching Chistery is an implicitly political act, which reveals that Elphaba’s mothering has taken on a distinctly masculine slant, at least by Ozian standards. Just as the Wizard passes anti-Animal legislation to further his own agenda, Chistery and his kin are nothing more than a means to an end for Elphaba, and she uses them to prove Dr. Dillamond’s theories. The affection she feels towards them is neither motherly nor feminine because it is akin to the affection that a scientist feels toward a successful experiment; there is no love. In fact, Elphaba admits as much when she reflects on her first attempts at stitching wings onto the monkeys, and how “[s]he had more or less perfected the procedure, after years of botched and hideous failures, when mercy killing seemed to be the only fair thing to do to the suffering subject” (334). The fact that she would devote time to raising Chistery and his kin, only to use them in dangerous experiments to further her own political and educational goals shows that her mothering is distinctly selfish and deviates harshly from the expected behavior of mothers in Oz.

Another example of Elphaba’s surrogate motherhood is her attempts to reclaim Nor after she and the rest of her family are kidnapped by Emerald City soldiers. When Nor is young, Elphaba treats her much like she does Liir, meaning she wants nothing to do with the girl.

Elphaba often scolds Nor for rifling through her belongings and stealing her papers (258). In addition, when Nor tries to attach herself to Elphaba after Manek's passing, Elphaba suspects mischief and violently dismisses the girl (294). However, after Sarima's family is kidnapped, Elphaba does everything in her power to reclaim them from the Wizard. When Nanny comments on Elphaba's unsuccessful search, Elphaba retorts, "I could find out nothing ... I bribed people. I spied around. I hired agents to follow every lead ... I spent a year following every useless clue. You *know* this. Don't torture me with the memory of my failure" (336). On the surface, it appears that Elphaba is pursuing the family out of the goodness of her heart. She knows that it is her fault that Sarima's family is taken, so she believes it is her responsibility to get them back. Elphaba's attachment to Sarima's family seems to indicate a sisterhood that she is loath to lose, so rescuing them appears a distinctly feminine pursuit.

However, Elphaba's true motives are soon brought to light, and it is clear that her pursuit of the Tigelaar family is anything but a selfless quest for sisterhood. In fact, when the Wizard reveals that Sarima and her sisters were publicly executed, "The Witch's breath caught in her chest. The last hopes of forgiveness gone!" (351). Elphaba does not care about the lives of Sarima or her sisters as people. Instead, Elphaba views them in terms of what they can do for her. In Sarima's case, Elphaba goes to Kiamo Ko seeking forgiveness for Fiyero's murder because she knows that she was the cause. Throughout the years, Sarima refuses to listen to Elphaba's confession, so the Witch never receives the forgiveness that she desires and must continue living with the guilt of destroying their family. Nevertheless, Elphaba persists in seeking forgiveness through the only remaining member of the Tigelaar family. When she discovers that Nor is alive and imprisoned by the Wizard, she bargains with him for her release. She begs the Wizard, and even offers her most powerful magical object, the Grimmerie, in

exchange for Nor's freedom (353). Elphaba regards her pursuit of personal fulfillment as more significant than the lives of others, which goes against the traditional femininity of motherhood.

Even when Elphaba tries to act motherly, her actions manifest as selfish undertakings because she is a female. As it stands, Elphaba's life follows the pattern that Zipes presents as typical for a male protagonist: "Along the way, the male hero ... learns to be active, competitive, industrious, cunning, and acquisitive ... His happiness depends on the just use of power" (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 70). In her youth, Elphaba dedicates herself to education and opposes the Wizard because he is a despot who abuses his position. She goes underground and becomes a political assassin who opposes a treacherous regime. By male standards, Elphaba is a person to be praised, to be emulated. If she were a man, her story would likely end with her rescuing blushing Oz from the Wizard's evil clutches, loved by the citizens and living happily ever after. However, Elphaba is a woman, which means that her actions are not considered heroic – they are reprehensible. For her "crime" of deviating from Oz's assigned gender norms, she earns the title Wicked Witch. Even so, Elphaba has full ownership over her life, which is more than most female fairy-tale protagonists have. No matter what happens, she is the one who decides what path to follow and what choices to make. The downside of this freedom is apparent – if she chooses her own path, then there is always the chance that she can choose wrongly. By choosing not to adhere to Oz's expectations of feminine behavior, Elphaba chooses the most difficult path a woman can – one that results in pain and isolation. Yet Elphaba remains true to herself and does not allow outside forces to dictate how she lives her life, and as a result she is shunned and abused for this choice. Nevertheless, Elphaba perseveres, and her demise is a result of the choices that she makes along the way.

Chapter Three – Education as a Lifestyle

Elphaba's pursuit of knowledge stands in sharp contrast to the typical female fairy-tale protagonist, who is most frequently a passive victim of circumstance, rather than an active participant in her own story. As a woman seeking to educate herself, Elphaba challenges Oz's gender stereotypes by enrolling in college with the sole intent of learning. In addition, Elphaba seeks knowledge and understanding throughout her life, oftentimes quite separately from her formal education. However, her thirst for knowledge differs greatly from the attitudes of the various women that she encounters. In fact, Elphaba's love of learning makes her an outlier in Oz's feminine circles, but she does not allow this status to deter her from her studies. She makes a conscious effort to both question what she is taught and to research multiple perspectives before forming her own opinions and embracing her own ideological positions. Throughout the story, Elphaba expresses her agency by choosing to learn and understand the world around her, even when she recognizes that dire consequences often come with knowledge.

Rather than aimlessly following others, Elphaba does her best to educate herself and develop her own worldview, even though her deviation from unionism causes a rift in her family. When Elphaba is young, she expresses agency through her staunch refusal to blindly accept her father's religious beliefs. Her father is a unionist minister, and throughout most of Elphaba's childhood, her family travelled as missionaries of the Unnamed God. Her father would use Elphaba as a lesson in his sermons, declaring that the Unnamed God loved her in spite of her green skin, which helped him reap converts (195). However, Elphaba never hides the fact that she is an atheist, even when it alienates her from her father and sister (138). Although she does feel bitter over how her father used her as a conversion tool, Elphaba's rejection of religion is not a manifestation of some childhood rebellion. In fact, Elphaba seeks out works by other unionists

to try to understand the thought processes behind their faith. For example, when Galinda interrupts Elphaba's reading one night, Elphaba reveals that she is studying "the speeches of the early unionist fathers" who are discussing the nature of evil (77). By studying these sermons, Elphaba creates a foundation of understanding for herself, rather than senselessly accepting her father's religion merely because he wants her to. Elphaba's behavior mirrors Wollstonecraft's assertion in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* that women must be educated in order to develop morality: "And how can a woman be expected to cooperate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous?" (72). Unlike Nessarose, who chooses to wholeheartedly follow the Unnamed God in an effort to please their father, Elphaba chooses to discover truth for herself. In fact, when Galinda asks why Elphaba studies evil instead of asking her father about it, Elphaba replies, "My father taught me a lot ... He taught me to read and write and think, and more. But not enough" (Maguire 79). Elphaba realizes that she should not rely on her father's perception of the world because his understanding is imperfect.

Moreover, Elphaba seems to be the only one of the females in her dorm who enters Crag Hall with the sole intent of getting an education. According to Galinda, she and the other girls could not care less about learning at the college; they only enroll because "they wanted Shiz itself. City life" (75). The students of Crag Hall come from all over Oz, so it makes sense that attending a school in Shiz, a city that is quite close to the nation's capital, would be exciting. In addition, the female students are less likely to take their studies seriously because Crag Hall "wasn't one of the better colleges – those were still closed to female students" (65). In Galinda's mind, making it into college is enough. Her acceptance to Shiz University proves that she is smart, and it gives her a good foothold to begin climbing the social ladder. By her own admission, "[i]t hadn't actually dawned on Galinda that there was more to learn, and furthermore

that she was expected to do it” (75). According to Wollstonecraft, the mindsets of women such as Galinda are quite troubling; when women sacrifice substance for beauty, when they value what others think over their own intelligence, they limit themselves to only being able to rise in the world through marriage (81). Indeed, Galinda proves that she is more focused on connections than education when she attends Madame Morrible’s poetry soiree. On the surface, attending a supplementary lecture of her own free will seems to suggest that Galinda does value her education. However, her actions throughout the event indicate otherwise. For example, Galinda makes an effort to arrive early so she can “lay claim to the upholstered chair that would best set off her own attire” (Maguire 82). In addition, she moves the chair “over to the bookshelves so that the light from the library tapers would gently fall on her” (82). These actions demonstrate that Galinda’s primary aim is not to learn, but to be admired by the men who attend the event. Indeed, her mindset is clearly shared by the majority of her classmates, who are “glad they had dressed well” when the male professors from Briscoe Hall arrive (82). Attending the poetry event is nothing more than a front to allow the female students the opportunity to peacock for male attention; it is a competition, as Galinda proves when she does not warn Shenshen, one of her friends, that candle wax is about to drip and ruin her dress (84). To the majority of Elphaba’s classmates, college is nothing more than a prolonged social function, rather than a rare opportunity for formal education.

In contrast to her classmates, Elphaba seizes her chance at an education and disregards most of the social aspects that Galinda and her cohorts seem to prize. Elphaba is constantly reading in the dorm, and she embraces the opportunity to attend the various educational events on campus. Elphaba attends these events solely for their educational value, as is shown by how her casual dress and the schoolbooks she brings with her to the poetry soiree clash with

Galinda's finery (83). Another discernable difference between the girls' behavior at this event comes after Madame Morrible completes her poetry recitations. Galinda notices that after each poem, the members of the audience turn and discuss the reading amongst themselves, and she does the same because she assumes "this was the accepted way of appreciating it [poetry]" (84). However, there is no educational intent behind Galinda's discussion with the other girls; she only wishes to appear educated, rather than actually educating herself through discussion with someone like Elphaba. Nevertheless, Elphaba attempts to engage Galinda in discussion until they are approached by a male student, after which Elphaba leaves because the educational portion of the event is over.

Even though her peers tend to stay quiet during academic lectures and take the speakers' words as true, Elphaba boldly questions what her professors teach. When Elphaba approaches Galinda at the event, she encourages her roommate to think critically about the poems Madame Morrible recites and why they were chosen. For example, after one poem ends with the line "Animals should be seen and not heard," Elphaba remarks on the political slant of the poem by saying, "It's a cleverness, isn't it? ... I mean that last line, you couldn't tell by that fancy accent whether it was meant to be Animals or animals" (84-85). Galinda believes that it is not their place as freshmen to question Madame Morrible's choices. Her refusal to seriously discuss the poems with Elphaba once again reflects Wollstonecraft's description of the uneducated woman: "[T]hey acquire manners before morals ... they become prey to prejudices ... they blindly submit to authority" (98). Similar to how Galinda and her friends make assumptions about Elphaba based on her wardrobe and skin color, so too do they make assumptions about what they ought and ought not to know. According to their reasoning, Madame Morrible is the headmistress of the school and far more educated than they are, so they should accept the wisdom that she shares

without question. However, Elphaba understands that Madame Morrible is a person with her own agenda and perspective, so she feels no qualms about challenging the headmistress' assertions.

Nevertheless, Elphaba's tendency to challenge her teachers demonstrates her ability to assume control over her own education – something that her classmates are either too afraid or too unaware to do. After the poetry soiree, Elphaba becomes more vocal in her attempts to learn, much to the irritation of her teachers. For example, Elphaba attends another event hosted by Madame Morrible, and she disrupts the discussion time by asking the headmistress why she chose to read the political Animal poem at the poetry soiree. When the headmistress takes offense at the interrogation, Elphaba explains, "I don't mean impertinence. I'm trying to learn" (90). It is as though she believes that any question she asks and any assumption she makes can be justified because her goal is to educate herself. She makes a habit of these interruptions as she progresses in her education, so much so that her friends acknowledge "[s]he was getting a terrible reputation as a loudmouth" (146). As opposed to Galinda, Elphaba chooses to "only bow to the authority of reason, instead of being the modest slave[s] of opinion" (Wollstonecraft 129). When teachers like Madame Morrible or Doctor Nikidik attempt to teach their opinions as facts or bring politics into the classroom, Elphaba stands up and demands they explain why: "This [lesson] has political implication ... I thought this was life sciences, not current events" (Maguire 145). By pushing back against the university's authority figures, rather than blindly accepting their teaching, Elphaba shows vigorous mental fortitude and strength of character.

Perhaps in response to her teachers' opinionated teaching styles, Elphaba also pursues academic inquiry outside of the college lectures and events. During her first summer at Crag Hall, Elphaba elects to work as a lab assistant to Doctor Dillamond as he attempts to make a

biological breakthrough. Dillamond's research fascinates Elphaba because it is tangible; unlike religion or sorcery, biological study yields results that can be seen and easily duplicated. This sort of study is concrete, and the results are unquestionable; biology appeals to Elphaba because it is knowledge with certainty – there is little guesswork in the findings. In addition, Dillamond's findings appeal directly to Elphaba's sense of morality because his research is meant to combat the Wizard's Banns on Animal Mobility. These Banns decree that Animals will no longer be able to apply for professional work, nor will they be able to hold any public jobs outside of farms or the wild (88-89). Obviously, these Banns are quite troublesome to Dillamond, who is a Goat working as a professor at Crag Hall. By assisting the Doctor, Elphaba demonstrates her reverence for knowledge. She truly believes that new research can change their country for the better because she assumes that Oz is primarily run by logic. She reveals her naïveté and idealism on the subject when her friend Boq questions whether or not the Wizard will be swayed by Dillamond's research: "But of course he must be. He's a man in power, it's his job to consider changes in knowledge" (111). Elphaba believes that in a world ruled by logic, acquiring knowledge is the best way to earn respect and create change, which is why she pursues Dillamond's research so passionately.

Throughout her college years, the idea that all reasoning creatures should be treated equally drives Elphaba's actions; this belief results from her experiences as a female, as a green-skinned person, and as a friend to oppressed creatures like Dillamond, whose basic research goal is to "isolate some bit of the biological architecture to prove that there *isn't any difference*, deep down in the invisible pockets of human and Animal flesh" (110). If he can do this, then he and Elphaba believe that the Wizard will have no grounds to uphold the Banns, and he will have a moral obligation to reverse them. After all, if all creatures with the ability to reason and speak

have identical biological structures, it is only logical that they be treated as equals. Elphaba follows the same rationale as Wollstonecraft when it comes to discrimination based on sex: “[W]ho made men the exclusive judge, if women partake with him the gift of reason?” (Wollstonecraft 73). As Wollstonecraft explains, everyone needs access to education in order to foster their reasoning capabilities (73). Indeed, Elphaba reveals this belief that education is the key to equality when she tells Boq, “And when the good Doctor is finished ferreting out the difference between Animals and people, I will propose he apply the same arguments to the differences between the sexes” (Maguire 111). Even as she conducts research for Dillamond, however, Elphaba is restricted from the better libraries and materials because she is female. As a result, she must use her male friends’ access in order to do the background research that Dillamond requests. Although this inequity is frustrating, Elphaba fully believes that Dillamond’s research will completely change the state of affairs in Oz, so she endures the discrimination with high hopes of a better future.

Despite her optimism, Elphaba soon discovers how dangerous it is to pursue knowledge that others want to remain hidden. Doctor Dillamond is far more shrewd and far less idealistic when it comes to his work; he understands the political ramifications far better than Elphaba does, so he keeps his research secret. As Elphaba explains to her research partners, Dillamond “did not want to announce any breakthroughs until he had figured out the most politically advantageous way to present them” (114). Even though Dillamond takes many precautions to ensure the credibility and secrecy of his research, he is murdered before he is able to publish his findings. It is only after his body is discovered that Elphaba comprehends the enormity of their work; Dillamond was attempting to change the political landscape of Oz, and there were people willing to murder him before he could create any concrete advancements for Animals. Until this

moment, it never seems to occur to Elphaba the lengths people will go to in order to prevent knowledge from being shared. Doctor Dillamond's murder makes Elphaba realize that continued pursuit of their research could lead to her own demise, as well as danger to the other people involved. After this realization, she completely cuts off Boq and the rest of her research team from the project and chooses to study it on her own (140). Elphaba chooses to continue Dillamond's work not only because she wants the answers, but also because she knows how necessary the research is to the future of her country. For the first time, Elphaba chooses to put herself in harm's way to pursue the truth. She resolutely believes that education will result in equality for all people of Oz, and she is willing to risk her life to achieve it.

In spite of her dedication to educating herself, Elphaba does not take the initiative to share her knowledge with other women, even when it would benefit them both. For example, when Elphaba breaks the solitude of her research and travels to the Emerald City, she enlists Glinda as a travelling companion without explaining why they are going. In "Forever Acting Alone: The Absence of Female Collaboration in Grimms' Fairy Tales," Michael Mendelson asserts that oftentimes, "unlike their male counterparts ... [female fairy-tale characters are] operating without the benefit of female companionship, support, understanding, or even contact," which creates isolation for the women (112). Theoretically, bringing Glinda along should have positively impacted Elphaba in her journey to the Emerald City because a female companion can provide support rooted in both their shared sex and a common purpose. However, Elphaba does not share the true purpose of the meeting with Glinda. Even though Elphaba refuses to follow others blindly, she expects Glinda to do exactly that on their mission because she does not wish to endanger her friend with knowledge on Dillamond's work.

However, Glinda's lack of knowledge about the research makes her more than willing to

accept the Wizard's obstinacy when the girls are in the throne room. In fact, Glinda critiques Elphaba often during the meeting, and even separates herself from Elphaba's cause by saying that "she doesn't speak for the both of us" (175). According to Mendelson, when fairy-tale females work together without a clear, shared goal in mind, their collaboration is "devoutly to be feared as an agent of destruction rather than praised as a means of support and empowerment" (118). Glinda's actions in the throne room wholly portray the negative consequences that female collaboration often inspires in fairy tales because Elphaba treats her as more of an accessory than an intellectual equal. If Elphaba truly wanted Glinda to be a source of support in their meeting with the Wizard, she would have taken the time to explain her intended purpose, rather than withholding necessary information from her companion. Glinda's ignorance about Dillamond's research makes her a liability in the meeting, and her ignorance is Elphaba's fault. Despite all her hopes for equality, Elphaba's pursuit of knowledge is largely self-centered, and intentionally or not, she prevents other women from gaining knowledge as a result.

In addition, Elphaba's first encounter with the Wizard helps her understand that learning for learning's sake is not enough to change the world she lives in. Up to the moment when Elphaba and Glinda meet with the Wizard, Elphaba wholeheartedly believes that giving him scientific proof of Dillamond's findings will be enough to change his mind about the treatment of Animals. Wollstonecraft describes tyrants as men who are "eager to crush reason, yet always assert that they usurp the throne only to be useful" (73). In Wollstonecraft's work, the tyrants are the men who withhold education from women for their own good and force them to remain ignorant of the world (73). In a similar fashion, the Wizard is a tyrant because he wants to keep Oz ignorant of Dillamond's research. By keeping his subjects in the dark about the similarities between Animal and human biology, the Wizard can enact policies that benefit himself and his

associates without any resistance from the people. This is why the Wizard calls Dillamond's work "[d]erivative, unauthenticated, specious garbage" without even looking at it (174). The Wizard already knows that the research is credible, but he does not care. His refusal to listen shocks Elphaba. She goes into the meeting, armed with knowledge and the moral high ground, but finds herself railroaded by something she has not yet encountered: purposeful ignorance from an authority figure.

It is in this meeting that Elphaba experiences her crisis of faith – until this moment, she has operated under the premise that education equals understanding, and that understanding leads to equality. Now, as she is confronted with the realities of tyranny and purposeful ignorance, her worldview begins to crumble. As Tatar explains in *Off with Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*, oftentimes in fairy tales, harsh "penalties [are] imposed on those who adhere to 'good behavior'" (42). In Elphaba's case, going to the Wizard with Dillamond's research is the morally correct thing to do; it is meant to help the oppressed citizens of Oz. However, approaching the Wizard with the truth puts a target on her back, like it did to Dillamond, and the knowledge that she gains makes her incapable of returning to school and her former life. Elphaba cannot forget all that she has learned, both about the Animals and the Wizard's corrupt regime, so she chooses to take what she now knows of the world and apply it in a way that can still provoke change. Elphaba's newfound knowledge of the world allows her to justify her actions in the rebellion against the Wizard, even though they may appear morally corrupt to others.

As Elphaba works her way into a life of political terrorism, her approach to education shifts to follow her newfound purpose. Elphaba knows that the Wizard is purposefully withholding information from his subjects to maintain his control over them. She refuses to

accept the continued oppression of the citizens of Oz by such a morally corrupt man; however, Elphaba's behavior is also morally suspect, not only as a member of a violent terrorist cell, but also as an adulteress. In *Off with Their Heads!*, Tatar explains that "stubbornness and curiosity invite persecution and virtually guarantee a violation of the rule that all ends well for fairy-tale heroes" (22). Throughout her time in the Emerald City, Elphaba proves herself stubborn in two respects: in her aversion to the Wizard and his regime and in her determination to carry on an affair with a married man. Elphaba's reading habits change as her understanding of education shifts from learning for learning's sake to using knowledge to justify her actions. Instead of studying unionist sermons on the existence of evil, Fiyero oftentimes finds her "reading essays on political theory or moral philosophy" (191). As an adult, she reads pieces that justify the evils that she commits: political philosophy can justify overthrowing despots, just as moral philosophy can justify immoral acts by questioning the source of morality. Moreover, Elphaba's approach to reading changes. Rather than struggle with the words and in a search for meaning, Elphaba tells Fiyero, "I don't ever really expect my slow, slanted impression of the world to change by what I read" (191). Elphaba knows that she is too stubborn to move from the course that she has chosen, even though she could if she chooses. According to Tatar's reasoning, Elphaba's unhappy ending is her own fault. Instead of searching for legal methods of fighting the Wizard, Elphaba chooses the path of violence, which ultimately leads to the people she loves being hurt. Even though Elphaba is smart enough to know that a life of political terrorism cannot end well for her, she chooses her path in frustration because her disillusionment in the Wizard's goodness blinds her to other options.

After Fiyero is murdered, Elphaba recognizes that her education is the source of most of hardship and heartache in her life, so she chooses to reject education entirely. Learning has been

central to Elphaba's existence until now, and by rejecting education, she is essentially cutting out a part of her innermost being. She retreats into maunthood to do penance and loses herself in the ritualistic nature of the lifestyle. Elphaba understands that it is her fault that Fiyero is dead; her form of atonement is choosing a life of physical toil in service to others instead of pursuing education and personal growth. In essence, she realizes that if she had not been so eager to learn, had not been so devoted to revealing the truth about the Wizard's cruelty, Fiyero would still be alive. She realizes the power that education grants to its bearer and decides that it is too much of a burden. As a result, Elphaba stops educating herself, so she cannot hurt anyone else.

However, the Superior Maunt recognizes that Elphaba needs more than a life at the cloister to be fulfilled. She sees Elphaba's time as a maunt as an interlude, rather than a culmination, so she pushes the girl toward her destiny by claiming, "You are returning to yourself" (225). The Superior Maunt perceives Elphaba's intelligence, and she encourages Elphaba to resume her studies by giving her paper and a quill, rare materials in Oz, as a parting gift from the cloister (224). When Elphaba establishes herself at Kiamo Ko, she begins writing again, inching her way back into the world of learning. This slow return to academia is shown by how angry she becomes when Nor draws pictures all over the pages Elphaba has written (257). No matter how she may try to suppress it, Elphaba has an untamable desire to understand the world around her, so it is logical that leaving the cloister's isolation and returning to the real world causes her curiosity about life to return as well.

By inviting education back into her life, Elphaba willingly sacrifices connections with other women for the sake of gaining more knowledge. During her time at the cloister, Elphaba assimilates to the sisterhood because, unlike at Crag Hall, she feels no need to challenge the status quo or push back against the sermons on the Unnamed God. However, as Elphaba

rediscovers her desire to learn, a stark contrast develops between her and the other women of Kiamo Ko. When she arrives at the castle, Elphaba has a choice: she can join the domesticity of Sarima's household and cultivate relationships with Fiyero's family, or she can lose herself in the Grimmerie and the knowledge it contains. The Grimmerie is a magical text that a sorcerer asked Sarima to hide many years before, and the words on each page shift and change shape, which makes them difficult to decipher (265). Sarima and Elphaba have vastly different reactions to this text. Even though the sorcerer stresses the Grimmerie's great importance when he gives it to Sarima, she does not care for the book because "[s]he could read now, but not well, and books made her feel inferior" (265). As a woman who already feels unconfident when approaching learning, a book with moving words and changing meaning obviously would not appeal to Sarima. However, Elphaba is entranced by the book, which the Wizard later reveals comes from another world (352). After finding it in the attic, Elphaba chooses to spend the majority of her time trying to decipher its pages. Indeed, when she later confronts the Wizard about freeing Nor, she surprises him by explaining how much of the text she has been able to read: "Though the drawings and the words seem misty to my eyes, I can continue to learn" (353). While Elphaba cautiously regains her curiosity about learning, Sarima remains obstinate in her refusal to do so. Elphaba, who has spent most of her life examining the world and trying to unravel its meaning, finds it difficult to relate to Sarima and her sisters because of their laissez-faire attitudes towards education and self-betterment. As a result, she retreats into her rooms at Kiamo Ko and makes very few attempts to connect with them on a personal level.

Sarima's children often mock Elphaba for her obsession with the Grimmerie because they do not fathom the purpose of education. For example, when Sarima's children spy on Elphaba, they see her reading from the book as she tries to teach Chistery to speak. Even though she

makes slight progress in her endeavor, the children can do nothing but laugh at her attempts (270). Later, Manek scorns Elphaba's experimentation amongst his siblings by calling her crazy and saying that she is fooling herself for believing that she could ever accomplish such a goal (273). Sarima's children have no reverence for books or education, which is primarily the fault of Sarima and her sisters. Rather than a strict form of education, the sisters try to throw together "some sort of lessons" for the children (268). Then, when the children prove to be too unruly to learn, the sisters give up and allow them to roam freely about the castle (268). In addition, Sarima makes excuses to Elphaba for why the children cannot be educated formally at a school, but the truth is that she simply does not regard it as important. She believes in the inherent goodness and wisdom of children, which irritates Elphaba immensely (277). Due to Elphaba's experience with learning as a child, she believes that proper education leads to well-behaved children and adults who are able to think for themselves (277). This line of thinking illustrates Wollstonecraft's idea that "[w]ithout knowledge, there can be no morality" (143). Elphaba attributes the ungovernable nature and mean-spiritedness of Sarima's children to their ignorance, and she believes that Sarima is crippling her children by refusing to educate them.

Despite the large distance between Kiamo Ko and Shiz University, marriage is still the ultimate form of fulfillment for the women in Sarima's family, and they view education as unnecessary. Like many of Elphaba's classmates at Crag Hall, Sarima and her sisters want nothing to do with learning because they care more about getting married than they do about improving themselves. However, the sisters are unable to marry because of Sarima's widowhood, as she is the eldest and must have a husband before they do (249). As a result of this deprivation, the sisters live lives of boredom and repetition. As Elphaba discovers, the castle attic contains many books, several of which Fiyero used during his education at Shiz. If Sarima and

her sisters wanted to, they would have enough reading material to last their entire lives, and some of it could even help fill the void in their tribe that Fiyero's murder created. For example, Elphaba tells Sarima the attic possesses "some records of usufruct pacts among various families of the Arjiki" (265). Throughout Elphaba's time at Kiamo Ko, Sarima complains of unrest in the tribe and how she fears for her sons' lives. If she took the time to read through all of the literature on her tribe and study the pacts that the people have made to her family, she could ease her anxiety and ensure a peaceful transition of power for Manek. However, Sarima is indifferent to the books, and she explains their existence in the attic with a simple "Well, books are so easy to set aside, aren't they?" (266). Of course, Elphaba cannot relate to this sentiment, but Sarima's sisters certainly can. Even though they are aware of the books in the attic, the sisters instead choose to read a novel about "a racy history of a poor young woman beset by an abundance of handsome suitors" (259). Rather than accepting their fates as spinsters and finding something more productive to do with their time, the sisters read the same book over and over again. Indeed, they behave like most of the women Elphaba encounters, believing "[p]lesasure is the business of a woman's life, according to the present modification of society" (Wollstonecraft 134). They cling to their dreams of one day being married, as if they have no other reason to exist, and they see no reason to deviate from this mindset.

However, Elphaba endures great frustration and pain from the ignorance of Sarima's family, particularly when the Gale Force soldiers arrive at Kiamo Ko. In her *Vindications*, Wollstonecraft explains that it is dangerous not to educate women because "they will, however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb ... orderly plans of reason which rise above their comprehension" (74). Sarima's family lives isolated from the rest of Oz, so they are unaware of the Wizard's political ambitions and cruelty.

Sarima's youngest child, Nor, has been sheltered her entire life and has no idea what the Gale Force soldiers signify, so she has no qualms about welcoming them and leading them into the castle. Indeed, Sarima and her sisters live by a code of hospitality, so they welcome the soldiers as well (Maguire 296). By allowing the soldiers into their home, Sarima's family gives the soldiers access to the ruling seat of Kiamo Ko and the entire Vinkus region, and they do not comprehend the danger they are putting themselves into. Elphaba, who understands Gale Force soldiers murdered Fiyero, tries to warn Sarima against allowing them lodging at Kiamo Ko: "I won't have it, Sarima ... you've never been out of here, you don't know who these men are or what they will do!" (296). Elphaba tries to use her knowledge of greater Oz to persuade Sarima to listen, but she is once again thwarted by the purposeful ignorance of an authority figure; Sarima is the mistress of Kiamo Ko, and she does not have to obey Elphaba, no matter how right she may be. Sarima's ignorance allows her family to be kidnapped and murdered, and Elphaba can do nothing to stop it.

In truth, Elphaba only finds education more frustrating than fulfilling when she begins treating knowledge as nothing more than a powerful tool. As she begins examining the Grimmerie even more intently, its lack of helpful information embitters her because the book contains nothing "on how to depose a tyrant – nothing useful" (293). Whereas she had once pursued learning for learning's sake, now her only goal for learning is to discover a magical way to overthrow the Wizard. After the Gale Force kidnaps the ruling family, Elphaba determines that she must get them back, and that the Grimmerie must help her do so because of the powerful magic it contains. When she goes to meet with the Wizard again, she makes sure to bring a page of the Grimmerie because she knows that she can use it as a bargaining chip for information about Sarima's family. Indeed, Elphaba knows how much valuable knowledge that the

Grimmerie holds, and she even tries to barter it for Nor's release into her custody (353). To Elphaba, the Grimmerie, with all its secret sorcery and knowledge, is worth as much as a human life, but when the Wizard refuses the deal, Elphaba is enraged that the book has failed her. Nevertheless, when he refuses her bargain, Elphaba decides that "she would die to keep it out of his hands" (354-355), which shows that she views her own life as less significant than the knowledge that the book contains. With her new understanding of knowledge, Elphaba knows that giving the Wizard access to a tool like the Grimmerie would lead to more pain and death for Oz, which is something that she refuses to allow.

As Elphaba matures, she continuously works to educate herself, but as her perception of knowledge shifts, so too does her approach to life. The research she performs as an idealistic college student becomes her political weapon as a vindictive adult. While many of the women around her seem to be victims of circumstance, willing to yield to societal pressures and expectations for their own chances at happiness, Elphaba does not conform. She seeks out opportunities to learn, and when she feels as though she is educated enough on a subject, she takes action, even when the action is unorthodox. At any point in her story, she could have refused to continue learning; as Elphaba grows older, it seems that the more she knows, the more she gets hurt. However, Elphaba obsesses over education because in her mind, educating herself is the only way she can achieve the equality that she so desperately desires. Even as education shifts in her mind from a source of fulfillment to a political weapon, she pursues it relentlessly, convinced that knowledge is the only thing that can save both herself and Oz. Even though she is a revisionary fairy-tale heroine, Elphaba's life is not bound by the inevitable ending of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*; instead, each of her choices shape the life she leads and the way she dies. By pursuing education for justice in a corrupt society, she understands that she is choosing

a path that will likely lead to her doom. Nevertheless, she perseveres because her life focuses on the pursuit of knowledge; to abandon learning in favor of an easier life would mean giving up who she really is.

Chapter Four – Violence for a Greater Good

One of the more recognizable ways that Elphaba wields agency throughout her life is in her decision to use physical violence against other people. Her use of violence demonstrates that she not only has power over her own life, but that she also possesses the power to influence lives outside of her own in ways that will directly benefit herself. For many fairy-tale heroines, the majority of their lives are spent yielding to the desires of others; they endure abuse without becoming bitter or vengeful, and they are rewarded for their restraint with a happy ending that oftentimes includes a terrible fate for their abusers. Elphaba differs from her fairy-tale counterparts because she embraces violence as a means to an end. Rather than waiting for time to heal the country's wounds or others to right her enemies' many wrongs, Elphaba makes it her mission to personally deliver justice to those who have wronged her. Indeed, Elphaba's use of violence is wholly retaliatory, meaning she does not seek out opportunities to hurt people, nor is she operating under some sort of compulsion. Instead, Elphaba identifies people that she understands to be dangerous to herself or to society as a whole, and then she takes on the responsibility of eradicating those threats. However, Elphaba never allows her desire for revenge to consume her entirely. While she spends a large portion of her life seeking ways to eliminate those who systematically abuse others, she also knows that violence at the expense of innocent people is unacceptable, no matter how she tries to rationalize it in her mind. Elphaba possesses the power to change people's lives with her actions, but she does her best to harm only those whom she believes deserve her wrath.

Throughout the story, Elphaba operates according to her own moral code, which she establishes through her extensive experience with religion, her personal research into the nature of evil, and her understanding of oppression. According to this code, those who have power and

use it to oppress or harm others are truly evil beings, and the only way to eliminate evil in humanity is to eradicate its host (292). Elphaba demonstrates her adherence to this code through her use of violence: throughout the novel, the primary form of violence she employs is murder. It may seem specious to reduce the enormity of Elphaba's actions to murder, but there is deeper meaning behind her severe shifts back and forth between non-violent academic to vengeful murderer. By limiting her violent actions to murder of those she deems deserving – those who abuse their power to victimize the less powerful – Elphaba reveals her distaste for protracted violence. She uses violence as a tool, but she takes little pleasure in wielding it. This distaste for violence is what separates her from her victims. In Elphaba's mind, people like the Wizard benefit from and take pleasure in hurting others, so much so that they prolong the violence they enact. For example, the Wizard's violence spans decades, in which he not only revokes Animal rights, but also systematically displaces the Quadlings from their ancestral homes: “[T]he Wizard's men began draining the badlands to get at the ruby deposits ... They manage to chase the Quadlings out and kill them, round them up in settlement camps for their own protection and starve them” (135). In contrast, Elphaba's use of violence has minimal personal benefits; indeed, each murder she attempts or performs has only negative consequences for herself, but she sees them as steps towards a greater good. Elphaba acts in accordance with her own moral code, rather than putting her own wellbeing first, and this allows her to rationalize each of her violent actions towards others.

For Elphaba, removing the Wizard from power is the only way to restore peace and establish a basis of equality for all sentient creatures in Oz, and her self-imposed moral code compels her to join the resistance. Joining the terrorist cell is a significant deviation from Elphaba's typical solitary behavior; even Fiyero comments on the strangeness of her camaraderie

with strangers (198). Yet Elphaba joins the group because she believes the terrorists, who share her goal of killing the Wizard, must also operate under a moral code that is similar to her own. Zipes explains, “The active, aggressive behavior of male types in the classical fairy tales gives way to a combined activism on the part of males and females who uncover those wishes, dreams, and needs that have been denied by social structures and institutions” (*Art of Subversion* 188). The Wizard is the masculine fairy-tale villain in this story, so it makes logical sense that Elphaba, a woman seeking justice, would need to join forces with like-minded others in order to combat such a tyrant. Indeed, he is the controlling force behind the social structures that subjugate the lower classes of Oz, so removing the Wizard from power should restore Oz to a state of relative peace.

However, Elphaba’s involvement with this terrorist group causes her moral compass to shift in a more extremist direction. While her primary target is the Wizard, she acknowledges to Fiyero that relatively innocent people can and have been caught in the crossfire when she says, “There are ... there will be ... accidents, I guess” (Maguire 198). Even though these civilians are not responsible for the evil that Elphaba wants to fight, she begins to accept their casualties as necessary for the greater good. Indeed, her attempts to justify their deaths with the terrorists’ rhetoric reveal how skewed her moral code has become: “Any casualty of the struggle is their fault, not ours. We don’t embrace violence but we don’t deny its existence” (198). Elphaba’s involvement with the resistance makes her callous towards civilian victims because any person who gets in the way of an operation becomes an obstacle to overthrowing the Wizard. As long as she remains a member of this terrorist organization, Elphaba must rationalize the deaths of innocent people, even though they are also victims under the Wizard’s regime, and their wellbeing is the greater good that she is pursuing.

As a terrorist, Elphaba feels comfortable accepting the task of murdering Madame Morrible because the headmistress fully represents the kind of power-hungry, abusive evil that Elphaba associates with the Wizard's regime. Sharon D. Kruse and Sandra Spickard Prettyman explain in "Women, Leadership, and Power Revisiting the Wicked Witch of the West" that Madame Morrible is one of the Wizard's chief officers because she is adept at using her position as the headmistress of Crag Hall "to control and manipulate events and people" (456). Indeed, Elphaba experiences this manipulation firsthand when Morrible tries to conscript her, Nessarose, and Glinda into secret service for the Wizard. Morrible uses sorcery to not only influence her students' thoughts, but also to bind them to silence, meaning that they are incapable of speaking about her offer to anyone (Maguire 161). This behavior is a clear abuse of power towards relatively powerless students. The terrorist organization selects Elphaba for this mission because she will be "taking out a possible successor or high-level ally" of the Wizard's (215), and her cover as a former student of Crag Hall will alleviate any suspicion of collusion with a larger organization (217). Elphaba's moral code dictates that Morrible must die in order for her practice of evil to be eradicated, so she is more than willing to accept the assignment.

Moreover, Morrible's approach to power does not belong in the idealistic Oz that Elphaba is fighting to establish. According to Kruse and Prettyman, the kind of power that both Morrible and the Wizard possess "is most often used to control others and benefit the self, and male models of leadership often focus on achievement for personal gain ... rather than for collective gain" (455). In essence, Elphaba is striving for a return to the distinctly female model of leadership for Oz that her parents experienced in their youth. Under this idealized female model, the Ozma uses her power to benefit every citizen, rather than to buoy the interests of selfish individuals. In order to achieve this idealistic society, Elphaba believes that she must

permanently remove those who stand in its way, and she approaches the task with no hesitation.

As she becomes more involved with the Emerald City's terrorist cell, Elphaba begins to condone violent acts against upper-class civilians by calling their innocence into question. Elphaba tries to convince Fiyero that civilian casualties are the necessary results of the underground warfare she is taking part in, especially when he disputes her claim that some lives matter more than others. For example, when they debate the worth of a society dame's life over that of lower-class citizen, Elphaba explains that in a crisis, people should try to spare the life of a society dame, "but not, not, *not* at the expense of other, realer people" (200). According to her argument, the lives of upper-class citizens are worth less because they directly benefit from the Wizard's cruel edicts. Elphaba's opinion directly mirrors Zipes' assertion that equality through feminism cannot exist in fairy-tale revisions "without challenging the structural embodiment of women in all the institutions that support the present socio-economic system" (*Relentless Progress* 129). By supporting and benefiting from the Wizard's regime, the hypothetical society dame forfeits her identity as a real person. As Elphaba only values real people – people who are directly oppressed by the Wizard's regime – the society dame's life has lesser value.

Even though she begins to rationalize the use of violence against the lives of civilians as a terrorist, Elphaba's self-imposed moral code prevents her from intentionally hurting innocent bystanders. Indeed, Elphaba's failed attack on Madame Morrible proves that the terrorist organization's rhetoric has not completely skewed her already ambiguous moral code. This code still dictates that harming those with less power is the true manifestation of evil in Oz and choosing to remain true to this personal code of ethics results in the failure of Elphaba's assassination attempt. When the "little upper-class mob of schoolgirls" appear and block Morrible from Elphaba's line of fire, Fiyero can "see [Elphaba's] hands fighting with each other,

to do it anyway, to keep from doing it – whatever *it* was” (Maguire 218). These girls will grow into society dames, whom Elphaba claims are less real, so their wellbeing should not take precedence over her mission to assassinate Morrible. Nevertheless, Elphaba does not complete her mission; she refuses to put the girls in danger, even though she views them as less important than the more real, the more oppressed masses. Elphaba has the power to use violence to achieve her goals, but choosing restraint shows that she possesses true control over her own actions.

Although Elphaba’s behavior throughout her early twenties mimics the vigilante feminism that some revisionists portray in their fairy-tale revisions, her use of violence is not exclusive enough to define her as a vigilante-feminist heroine. D’Amore explains that vigilante feminism “seeks social equality between men and women by reappropriating the tactics of a traditionally violent masculinity for feminine ends” (390). By accepting murder as the primary method for fixing Oz’s problems, Elphaba does accept the role of a vigilante. Indeed, Elphaba even follows D’Amore’s reasoning that “women can be hardened into weapons that destroy those who seek to harm them” (402). For example, when Elphaba finally explains her mission to Fiyero, she describes herself in terms of weaponry: “I am not the arrowhead, I am not the dart, I am just the shaft, the quiver” (Maguire 206). However, Elphaba cannot be considered a vigilante feminist heroine because the abuse she is fighting has had little personal impact on her; the evil she is fighting is primarily systemic. D’Amore specifies that vigilante feminists take up the task of fighting men because of their personal experience with “sexual assault, abduction, abuse, and trauma” and because they want to help others avoid similar situations (387). Although one could argue that Elphaba experiences abuse because of her greenness, her skin color is not what drives her to fight against the Wizard. Apart from feeling the stares of strangers, Elphaba lives a life that is mostly free from the kinds of oppression that Animals endure. If she had chosen to accept

the Wizard's governing as it was in her college days, it is likely that she would have lived a relatively normal life. Instead, Elphaba takes up Doctor Dillamond's cause, not because she can personally relate to Animal struggles, but because she sympathizes with their struggle for equality.

Unlike vigilante feminism, Elphaba's violence is not focused on eliminating those who pose threats to her personally (D'Amore 388). In fact, the two primary targets of her violence show little concern for her as a person, and neither of them plans violence against Elphaba during their initial interactions. During their time at Crag Hall, Madame Morrible acknowledges that Galinda, Nessarose, and Elphaba are free to reject her offer of service under the Wizard, and she responds to their reticence with, "Well, you are not the only fish in the sea, are you?" (Maguire 161). Elphaba is not significant to Morrible as a target or a rival; Elphaba is simply one of many girls that Morrible can manipulate, so she holds no real significance to the headmistress until she joins the terrorist cell. In addition, when Elphaba meets the Wizard for the second time, she has to remind them that they have met before (354). She spends much of her life plotting the Wizard's downfall, and he does not remember meeting the only green girl in his country; this lack of concern shows that he views Elphaba as more of a nuisance than a true threat to his rule. Although Elphaba's violent behavior in her youth can be considered vigilantism, her actions are not those of a vigilante feminist character because she uses violence against both genders to provoke political change, not to prevent personal harm.

In fact, Elphaba's attempted murder of Madame Morrible further strays from the practice of vigilante feminism because Elphaba's actions are purely retaliatory. Rather than fighting against the great evil of the Wizard's regime, Elphaba attacks Morrible in the headmistress' dotage to avenge the first act of violence that those in power personally direct at her. The only

personal harm that the Wizard commits against Elphaba, besides sending Dorothy to finish her off, is murdering Fiyero. This murder only occurs after Elphaba joins a terrorist group that is determined to kill all those in collusion with the Glorious Regime; Morrible does not see Elphaba as a threat until she begins affiliating with the terrorists, after which she informs the Wizard of Elphaba's affair (354). When Elphaba discovers that Morrible is to blame for Fiyero's death, she wastes no time in finding the woman to kill her. Although she believes her actions are justified, going to murder Morrible is a significant deviation from the moral code by which Elphaba lives. When Elphaba encounters the former headmistress, she no longer possesses any power or the ability to influence and abuse others. In fact, the new headmistress explains to Elphaba that Morrible is near death, and Elphaba finds Morrible dead in the Doddery (363, 365). By Elphaba's usual reasoning, Morrible no longer possesses any power, and she can no longer pose a threat to the people of Oz, meaning Elphaba could leave her in peace with no fear of negative consequences.

Nevertheless, Elphaba chooses violence, even though the only person who can possibly benefit from Morrible's assault is Elphaba. Indeed, the futility of Elphaba's attack on Morrible's corpse is thoroughly encapsulated by the inscription on the trophy that Elphaba uses to bash her head in: "IN APPRECIATION OF EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE" (365). Elphaba is not the cause of Morrible's death and taking credit for killing her does not accomplish anything or change Oz in any way; the Wizard is still in power, and Elphaba is still incapable of overthrowing him with violence. However, Morrible's battery provides closure; for the first time, Elphaba chooses to use violence to help herself and achieve some semblance of peace in her tumultuous life. As Butler examines Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, she notes that the violence in the text "is neither a simple 'turning of the tables' in which women now wage violence against men,

nor a simple *internalization* of masculine norms such that women now wage violence against themselves” (161). Violence is a power that has been stripped from many literary females because it is labelled as masculine, but it is a power that people of any sex can choose to use when it suits their interests. Defiling Madame Morrible’s corpse is an act of retaliation because the headmistress is to blame for Fiyero’s murder. More than this, Elphaba feels profoundly guilty for Fiyero’s death and carries that guilt with her for her entire adult life, when it is really Morrible’s fault that he dies. Desecrating Madame Morrible as an act of retaliation does more than avenge Fiyero’s death; it is payback for all of the grief and suffering that Elphaba experiences in the aftermath of his murder, even though the woman she punishes is in no condition to fight back or defend herself. Elphaba experiences pure rage, and channeling that rage into violent action is not significant because Elphaba is a woman, but because she is a person who is violating her own self-imposed moral code. When Elphaba goes to face the elderly headmistress, Elphaba knows that she holds all of the power. She chooses to murder the woman and, when Elphaba discovers that she is too late, she chooses to brutally bludgeon Morrible’s body for a crime committed against her decades earlier; by making this decision, Elphaba embodies the evil against which she has spent her entire life fighting.

As Elphaba grows older, her subconscious mind also begins seeking retaliatory justice for those around her through magical means. One of the victims of her burgeoning magical abilities is Manek, who differs from the rest of Elphaba’s victims because he is an eleven-year-old child (246). Before Manek, Elphaba’s murderous intentions are focused entirely on adults. The adults she has encountered have power to abuse and are thus capable of evil. However, Manek is a malicious character, and despite his age, he holds enough power and influence in Sarima’s household that he can abuse his siblings with no negative consequences from his mother or

aunts. Manek's power stems from both his temperament and his future role as chief of the Arjiki clan. When discussing the boys' futures, Sarima's sister Two explains, "Manek is the more obvious candidate [for chieftain], but he's only second in line" (261). Manek's fearless attitude and disregard for the feelings of others give him an air of manliness that his older brother, Irji, lacks, and each member of the family assumes that he will usurp his brother and control the clan when he comes of age. The sisters reveal this mindset as they grieve Manek's death: "Their sad lot had been bearable all these years because Manek was going to be the man Fiyero had been, and maybe more. They realized in retrospect that they had expected Manek to restore the fallen fortunes of Kiamo Ko" (293-294). Due to the high expectations for Manek's future, Sarima and the aunts allow him to roam wildly about the castle with minimal supervision. However, this lack of accountability gives him the freedom to abuse his siblings. Manek is such a cruel brother that Irji and Nor's relationship with each other rests on the imperative to protect each other from his tricks and schemes. In fact, Irji and Nor grow apart after Manek's death because their primary relationship involved "a sort of allegiance ... against the headstrong malice of Manek" (294). Even though Manek is much younger than the other adversaries that Elphaba faces in this story, he still uses his power to hurt those around him, which makes him a suitable target for Elphaba's ire.

However, Manek's murder is not a retaliation against his treatment of his siblings, but because of how he abuses Elphaba's son. Although Elphaba does not necessarily hold motherly feelings towards Liir, she feels a level of responsibility for him, particularly when she realizes that he is Fiyero's son. Therefore, it is understandable that she is upset by Manek's treatment of the boy. Liir becomes the object of Manek's torment on the very first day that he steps into the castle. In the first conversation that Nor has with Sarima, Nor reveals that right after meeting

Liir, “Manek was throwing stones at him to see how far they would bounce off him” (246). Then he forces Liir to remove his pants so that the siblings can check to see if his penis is green like Elphaba’s skin (247). Even with the power that he wields within the household, Manek can only get away with so much mistreatment of his siblings because his mother loves them. However, Liir is a fresh victim with seemingly no allies; the Witch shows no outward affection towards him, and Sarima and the aunts merely tolerate his presence. As a result, Manek’s abusive behavior escalates from public humiliation to the point where he has no qualms about threatening to throw Liir off the roof for minor offences, such as not revealing secrets (251). As if tormenting the poor boy is not enough, Manek almost kills Liir by trapping him in the castle’s fishwell. When Liir is found, Manek shows no remorse for his actions, and he lies about having no knowledge of the situation: “‘Oh, is that where he was,’ said Manek in a funny voice. ‘You know he said he wanted to go down in that fishwell once’” (282). Manek treats Liir as if he is expendable, and the only one who protests against this treatment is Elphaba. When Sarima blames Elphaba for this incident, “Elphie knew in her heart that it was Manek, horrible evil Manek, who had tortured the boy unmercifully and openly all winter” (289). Throughout all of this mistreatment, Elphaba understands that Sarima will never find fault with Manek, so justice will never be served.

As a result of Sarima’s lackadaisical parenting, Elphaba’s latent magical abilities are significant when they manifest because their only function is to fulfill her innate desire for justice in the world. While Elphaba fails to usurp the Wizard or assassinate Madame Morrible through physical means in her youth, her magical abilities give her the power to eradicate the malicious force that is Manek, even if it is indirect. Her magic still adheres to her self-imposed code of ethics, as is demonstrated by the fact that the icicle only “caught [Manek] in the skull as

he went out to find some new way of beleaguering Liir” (286). Her magic only allows the icicle to harm someone that Elphaba deems evil. As Elphaba’s magic reveals itself, it proves to be far more ethical in practice than the other manifestations of magic in the novel. Madame Morrible uses her magic for manipulation, which is clearly an abuse of power. However, even seemingly pious characters like Nessarose use magic in a self-serving way, rather than for the greater good of Oz. For example, Nessarose is willing to enchant an axe to mutilate a complete stranger, all in exchange for a few Animals (314). Even though Elphaba’s use of magic is not morally righteous, her powers only manifest to right perceived wrongs, rather than to fulfill selfish desires. Indeed, when Elphaba tries to use magic to help herself, it fails her. For example, when Liir reveals that a fish told him Fiyero is his father, Elphaba stares at Sarima and tries to force her into accepting the truth, but she is unsuccessful (289). In “The Many Roads of Oz: An Existential Reading of Maguire’s ‘Wicked Witch of the West,’” Sean Ferrier-Watson explains that “[w]hile she may have the power to mold and impact the physical world with magic, she cannot force her will on another person through such means” (228). She cannot make others behave in accordance with her own morality. Therefore, Elphaba cannot prevent people from abusing their power; the only option she sees is retaliation when the people she cares about are the victims.

In many fairy tales, anger is an emotion that is often deemed too severe for the heroines; they are more frequently depicted as fearful of, or compassionate towards, their abusers, rather than vengeful. One reason that Elphaba’s powers manifest so violently and result in Manek’s murder is because she accesses the magic by focusing her anger. In fact, Sarima reveals that this kind of violent anger, or hot anger, is an emotion reserved for men because “[t]hey need the inclination to fight, the drive to sink the knife into the flesh,” (285). However, she also argues that women’s anger is cold and ceaseless as “the talent to avoid forgiveness ... [to] never back

down, ever, ever” (286). Even Sarima, a figure who is decidedly more feminine than Elphaba, acknowledges that women need anger to survive in a world that so often stacks the deck against females, but the anger is distinct from the sort that men use to harm each other. When Sarima separates hot and cold anger by gender, she is adhering “to a strategy that consolidates women’s identity through an exclusionary process of differentiation” (Butler 160). Sarima categorizes the kind of anger that she holds, towards both Elphaba and the world, and generalizes it to encompass her entire gender to justify the discrepancy between the hatred she feels towards Elphaba and the hospitality and kindness Sarima shows her. However, Elphaba can only access her magic by acknowledging that she possesses both hot and cold anger, and she must find a way to use them simultaneously. Elphaba must reject Sarima’s categorization of anger as gender-based and examine how anger truly functions within herself. As she considers hot and cold anger, Elphaba focuses on the icicle that will become her unwitting murder weapon: “Warm and cold anger working together to make a fury, a fury worthy enough to use as a weapon against the old things that still needed fighting” (Maguire 286). By focusing her anger as a weapon, Elphaba unleashes her magic, thus taking ownership over a violence “that originally appeared to belong to the masculine domain” (Butler 161), while simultaneously tapping into a source of anger that has longevity. As a result, Elphaba acts “both passive-aggressively and aggressively at the same time” (Ferrier-Watson 231). She does not plan to kill Manek, but she subconsciously wills it to happen, and although the subconscious aspect means Elphaba cannot be blamed for the act, she is still responsible for his death. In this case, Elphaba uses violence to fulfill her desire for justice against Manek, which is only possible after she accepts anger as a non-exclusionary emotion.

In contrast to the Wicked Witch of the West’s behavior in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Elphaba’s initial violence towards Dorothy is completely retaliatory. In Baum’s original story,

the Witch sets her wolves upon the travelers because she is angry when they venture into her domain (37). Elphaba, however, sends Killjoy, her mutt, and his pack down to show the Dorothy and her companions the fastest way to the castle (Maguire 390). This distinction between the two texts is important because it gives context for Elphaba's later actions towards Dorothy. While Baum's Witch sends the wolves as a killing force, Elphaba sends hers as a welcome party, but both packs are met with death at the hands of the Tin Woodman. The senseless slaughter of her wolves enrages Elphaba, and the rest of her attacks on Dorothy, both with her crows and her bees, are reactions to the unjust murder of her wolves. In reality, Elphaba has every reason to be angry with Dorothy: purposefully or not, the girl murdered Nessarose and removed her shoes from Elphaba's grasp, and now she is on her way to murder Elphaba under the Wizard's orders. Ferrier-Watson explains that Dorothy is not a passive victim in this tale; rather than denying the Wizard's request outright and remaining in Oz, she chooses to travel to the Witch's castle, which implies to everyone that she has accepted the role of assassin (227). This choice is why Elphaba finds it permissible to channel her anger into violent actions towards Dorothy and her companions; because of all the girl has done, Elphaba rationalizes that Dorothy deserves to be hurt.

Nevertheless, Dorothy's existence presents a conflict to Elphaba's moral code: she is a young girl, the kind of figure who typically possesses little to no power in Oz, but she consistently causes Elphaba pain. Indeed, Elphaba reveals as much when she says, "Everything I have, every little thing I have, dies when you come across it ... My beasts are dead, my sister is dead, you strew death in your path, and you're just a girl" (Maguire 400). Although Dorothy appears externally powerless because of her age and gender, she has a distinctly negative influence on Elphaba's life. Her perceived innocence gives Dorothy power over the citizens of

Oz, and Elphaba rationalizes that this power is dangerous: “Did Madame Morrible conscript you for service to the hidden power? You work in collusion: my sister’s shoes, my friend’s charm, and your innocent strength” (400). It is only by rationalizing in this way that Elphaba can justify murdering the child because accepting each of Dorothy’s violent actions as accidents or misunderstandings does not align with Elphaba’s worldview. In Elphaba’s world, violence is a tool that is wielded purposefully, both by herself, as she wields it for justice, and by the Wizard, who wields it for selfish gain. Therefore, Dorothy must also be wielding violence for her own self-interests, whatever they may be.

In fact, Dorothy’s use of violence strangely adheres to Elphaba’s own code of ethics. According to Elphaba’s self-imposed moral code, those who use power to harm the less powerful are evil and must be eradicated. When Nessarose was a tyrant who hurt people for fun, Dorothy squashed her with a house, thus eradicating her as a source of evil. It is now common knowledge that Elphaba murdered Madame Morrible, a defenseless old woman, in cold blood (385); by her own standards, Elphaba is evil and should also be done away with, and Dorothy has come to finish the job. In order to prevent this fate, Elphaba must justify hurting the girl, even though she understands that it is wrong. When she tells Dorothy, “I’ll kill you, for in times like these, my little one, you must kill before you are killed” (401), Elphaba is confessing that she must kill Dorothy, not because she is powerful or evil, but because death follows the girl, and Elphaba does not want to be another victim. Her final choice in life is to use violence against one whom she believes would kill her, but her old code prevents her from following through when Dorothy apologizes; no matter how she tries to rationalize it, Dorothy is an innocent, and Elphaba has never been able to justify killing innocents.

As a female fairy-tale protagonist, Elphaba consistently chooses violent methods of

responding to the injustices that she sees in the world. While others use violence as a method of subjugation, Elphaba uses violence to free both herself and others from those that abuse their power. Even when she is unaffected by political decrees or systematic misconduct, Elphaba chooses to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves because she understands from an early age that power-hungry people will never stop hurting others to get what they want. In this way, Elphaba exerts a level of control over other people that fairy-tale females typically do not possess. Each action that she takes creates a ripple effect in her world – each act of violence has significance that extends beyond herself. In addition, Elphaba is not ruled by the passion that drives her to kill for the greater good of her country. Even in the midst of her violent acts, Elphaba demonstrates an ability to stop and reconsider her actions. Every time she wants to hurt someone, she has to choose whether or not to follow through. In fact, the rationality that drives her violent behavior also drives her compassion towards innocent people. Throughout the novel, Elphaba has opportunities to eliminate dangerous people at the expense of innocent lives, and each time, she chooses to restrain herself. She lives her life according to an ethical code that can only rationalize murder if it is deserved, meaning that she must carefully weigh the value of each human life before she acts. Even when she truly wants to hurt someone like Dorothy, she hesitates to ensure that she is willing to accept the consequence of guilt for such an act. As a result, Elphaba does not use violence against innocent people because she understands they do not deserve to be hurt, and she knows she cannot improve Oz if she harms its citizens as a means to an end.

Conclusion

The strength of Maguire's work does not come from its female-centric story, nor does it come from the matriarchal mythology that he draws from Baum's original series and expands upon. Instead, *Wicked* is a powerful feminist fairy-tale revision because it treats its protagonist, Elphaba, with all the respect and careful characterization that any well-developed character deserves. Even though Maguire did not create *Wicked* intending for it to stand as a benchmark work of feminist fairy-tale revision, its undisguised sympathy for its female character makes it one to be emulated. Unlike many other feminist revisions, Elphaba's life is not meant to teach the reader anything about the nature of woman. It does not intend to make Elphaba a representative of femaleness in literature. Her femaleness does not determine the course of her story, and although her biological sex may influence how others see her, it neither inhibits her behavior nor prevents her from pursuing her own goals.

Elphaba wields agency over her own life, and it is this agency that makes her character so realistic. She is not the depiction of the perfect woman who is a victim of circumstance; Elphaba represents real, disenfranchised women who have the power to make their own decisions, even when those decisions are terrible. In essence, *Wicked* is an effective feminist fairy-tale revision because Elphaba's importance in no way relies on her being a female. Instead, Elphaba is important because she is a person. She has thoughts and desires that are based wholly on her upbringing and experiences, rather than on some idea of how the ideal, empowered female would react in her situation. The audience can empathize with the various difficulties she faces. Even though she inhabits a world that is full of magic, Elphaba's problems are genuine and relatable, and the ways in which she combats those problems, while not completely justifiable, are certainly understandable.

As long as the Western-European fairy tales that Perrault, Anderson, and the Grimms collected are firmly situated within Western society, so too will the messages that those collectors grafted into the original stories be prevalent. These collectors had no problem “mutilating the folkloric text whose authenticity they so admired” by integrating their own cultures’ perceptions of gender roles into the texts (Tatar, *Hard Facts* 10), but the gender roles that relegate women to lives of passive domesticity are no longer widely accepted in Western society. Nevertheless, many people still treasure the very fairy tales that portray female characters fulfilling these roles. The widespread attachment to these tales has more to do with the magical lands and fantastical means that the characters use to solve their problems than with the people who inhabit them, primarily because the characterization of these figures is so two-dimensional. So many iterations of fairy tales exist and are continuously consumed because of Western society’s sustained attachment to these tales. This cultural fascination gives revisionary authors the opportunity to reimagine the classic stories without fear that their revisions will be ignored or overlooked.

Therefore, authors should take confidence in the idea that revising fairy tales to create a more realistic, inclusive imaginative vision will not only be accepted, but celebrated. People actively seek out representations of themselves in the stories they consume – they need someone to relate to, someone they can admire who goes through similar difficulties. In the classic fairy tales, the only gender representatives that the female readers see are the evil witch and the mild, helpless heroine. By including capable, realistic female characters in fairy-tale revisions, feminist authors not only subvert the negative messages about gender roles that classic fairy tales convey, but they also provide their audiences figures with which they can empathize. When a fairy-tale heroine experiences hardship in her story and has the agency to overcome the obstacles through

her own means, she gives the female readers reassurance that they too can conquer the difficulties in their own lives without relying on a handsome prince to come to the rescue.

Indeed, feminist authors can create positive change in the world by revising fairy tales to emphasize the power and capability of the female characters. Feminist authors who want to change the way that women are perceived, both in literature and in everyday life, can use fairy tales as their canvases because of the tales' influence and longevity. Zipes notes that “[f]olktales and fairy tales have always been dependent on customs, rituals, and values in the particular socialization process of a social system. They have always symbolically depicted the nature of power relationships within a given society” (*Art of Subversion* 79). Western society no longer values strict adherence to gender roles. Therefore, those roles should no longer be lauded in the tales that pervade the culture.

By shifting the focus of these tales from gender-specific behaviors to realistic depictions of people dealing with magical problems, feminist authors can conceivably influence and chart the shifting power dynamics from a male-dominated culture to equality for all within their own societies. While this might seem like an ambitious aim, Zipes goes on to explain that the “happily ever after” that commonly concludes fairy tales “reflect[s] the possibility for a transformation of constraining social conditions through major changes in social relations” (188). Fairy tales already suggest that their characters' conditions can be altered and improved through social change, and fairy-tale revisions can honor this sentiment by transforming the female heroines from two-dimensional figureheads into competent, realistic characters. By implementing these changes, feminist authors will demonstrate that the realism of the female characters is an improvement, both for the characters and the story as a whole.

Moving forward, feminist authors who choose to revise fairy tales must fully shoulder the considerable responsibility of the task and understand that such work should not be taken lightly. Half-hearted attempts at revision, although they may be well-intentioned, do less to improve the genre and more to undercut the attempts of the feminist authors who are willing to put in the effort to present their female characters as real, complex people. Daniel Haase explains that feminist revision must be “a self-conscious, critical engagement with the classical tales as a means to liberate women to imagine and construct new identities” (21). If revisionary authors seek to do any less than this, then their works should not be considered feminist revisions. As they revise these tales, authors should emulate Maguire’s method of storytelling: he maintains the integrity of the original fairy tale while providing much-needed perspective into the motivations of a significant character. He neither condones Elphaba’s actions, nor does he ask his audience to; instead, he presents Elphaba’s life and gives his audience enough information to draw their own conclusions about her. Elphaba possesses full control over herself and her actions, and her agency is what makes her a realistic female, not her biology. As feminist authors craft their own fairy-tale revisions, they must do so with the understanding that the tales they create are the future of the genre, and they must ensure that the characterizations that they include are truly representative of people as a whole. By creating female fairy-tale characters with a firm hold on their own agency, these authors construct role models for the twenty-first century, so they must do their best to get it ‘right.’

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