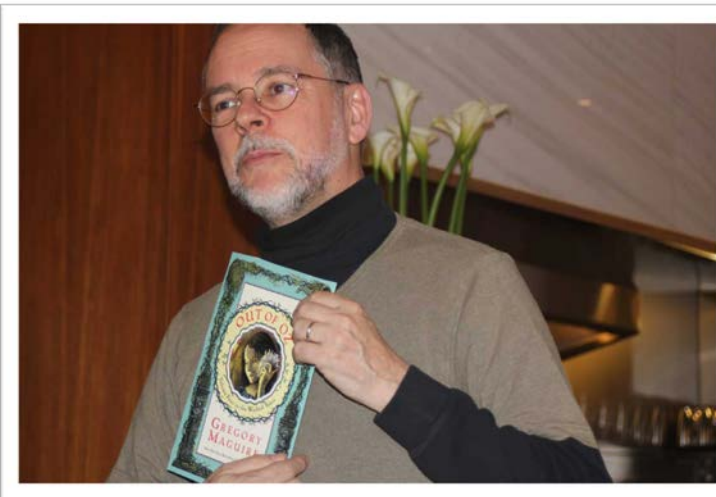


## MAGUIRE'S INTERVIEW

**Maguire** : So, who wants to ask a question? I am not scary!

**Sofia:**I'm interested in the character of Dr.Dillamond. You gave him the characteristics of a goat. Does it derive from the phrase “the scapegoat”?

**Maguire:** The question is about Dr Dillamond and that I have given the teacher the characteristics of a goat and if I intentionally gave him his animal form. Here is an interesting thing. I think that for anybody working in the Arts as a writer, as an actor, as a painter, a poet, there are several ways that one works all at once. One way is obviously with the mind, with the intellect, but another way is with...well... you might say with what the Muse



**GREGORY MAGUIRE SHOWING HIS LATEST BOOK**

tells you to do..., with the instinct, with the imagination. That was a great question to ask, Sofia, because it's a good example of how a writer or any creative person relies on their own instinct. Your instinct, I think, your subconscious, the part of the dreams is a lot smarter than your head.

That's what I think. So, when I was writing the book about fifteen, sixteen years ago, I wrote from the first moment into the end. That's always how I write! I wrote the scene... Glinda is on her way to school, she's in the train, she has never been far away from her home, a little village somewhere, but she's going to the big city for school and she looks at the window. She doesn't look at the landscape. She's too young to care about anything but herself. What she looks at is her reflection in the glass and she thinks to herself: “How beautiful I am! I am a girl going to college!” and a girl going to college is a beautiful thing but she doesn't think about the college. She thinks about herself being beautiful. She's so happy with that thought that she is glad the old goat sitting in the seat across from her was snoring. She didn't want to have to talk to anybody. She just wanted to admire herself. Now, that's where I closed the book that day. I stopped writing, put my pen down and went to have dinner. The next day, to get ready, I read what I

had written the day before and I read that line that Glinda was happy that the old goat sitting in the seat opposite her was asleep. The night before I had thought that was an old man with a cigar, maybe a little smelly, but when I read it the next day, I saw what my subconscious had told me. I thought : “Oh, my goodness! That’s not an old man. That’s a goat! That’s a real goat! Glinda is going to school and there’s a goat sitting in the same train. I didn’t know until that sentence that there were going to be animals in the story. I didn’t know that there were going to be talking animals. I thought : “Where did that come from?” and I decided to keep writing to find out. And then the goat opened up his mouth and he introduced himself as Dr. Dillamond. And then, I had a new character, but I didn’t put him there. The Muse put him there. My instinct put him there and my waking mind looked at what I had done to find clues about what would happen next. Now, once I realized he was a goat, I thought that it was perfect, because a goat is a rather abused animal. Let’s face it! Goats are not elevated on top of columns to be admired. Goats are humble and easy to catch. So I could see, as soon as I realized who he was, I had an idea about what would happen to him, but it was my subconscious, not my conscious mind that decided to use a goat. If you could go back and read the book, you would see that page is about page 95 and there are no talking animals in the first 94 pages of the book. I did not go back and put them in because I wanted to be as much a surprise to the reader as it was to me when I was writing the book. Thank you for being brave enough to be the first to ask a question.

**Marina S. :** I’d like to ask you one question.

**Maguire:** Certainly!

**Marina:** What motivated you to write a new version of Frank Baum’s novel *The Wizard of Oz*?

**Maguire :** The question is what motivated me to actually get into this story, to rewrite *The Wizard of Oz*. *The Wizard of Oz* is a very good book by itself and you probably know the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, with Judy Garland, and the song *Over the rainbow* , and all the singing and dancing. Well, the motivation was not to write a new *Wizard of Oz*, the motivation was to write about evil. I’ll tell you a story. Almost twenty years ago, I was older than you are now but not as old as I am now. I was living in England and something terrible happened. A small child, two years old, wandered away from his mother and disappeared, was never seen. A warning came out from the

police to say : “Where is this child? Has he been kidnapped?” Then, the next day his body was found. He had been killed. So, everybody was heartbroken. It was a beautiful child with his face on the front of every newspaper and every TV screen. They began looking for the man who had killed him and they studied the security cameras that take pictures in public places and stores and they found that the last people who had seen this child were two boys. One was eleven years old and one was fourteen. They discovered after some detective work that the child had just wandered away from his mother and was looking at various things in the store and two boys, who were supposed to be at school but weren’t, saw him and they just came out and took his hands and they walked away with him, they bought him an ice-cream, they treated him as if he was their little brother, until that little boy probably started to cry. They didn’t know what to do. They took him down to the railway and threw stones at him until he was dead. And then, they left his body on the railroad chest to make it look as if he had been moved over by a train. This is a terrible story, but it was the beginning, in a way, of *Wicked*, because what happened in England in the weeks that followed, when it was discovered that it wasn’t a grown-up, it wasn’t a monster, it was children who had done this, the famous old questions that we all have come back to the forefront. Everyone was asking one another :”How could children do this?”, “How could children learn evil?”, “Where does evil come from?”, “Were these children born evil?”, “Did something happen to them that made them feel compelled to do such a terrible thing?” , “Were they sick or did, maybe, the devil get into them?”. There are all kinds of ways that human beings use to discuss the capacity of human beings to do something so dreadful. I don’t know the answer. I don’t know where evil comes from, but the question seems so important to me that I thought :”I’d better write a story about it. I cannot think very fast, but if I write, maybe, I’ll see what I think”. So, my real burning thought was to write about evil. Not to write about *The Wizard of Oz*. But, I also needed some money and so, I also thought :”If I want people to buy this book, then, maybe, I should write about an evil character that everybody already knows. And then, the idea came to my mind! I don’t have to look for evil in my own heart, but I can look in a book and see who else is evil and, maybe, I can learn something. At first, I thought that I would write a novel about Hitler and thought that Hitler is evil and that everybody knows Hitler is evil. Maybe I could discover Hitler is evil after all these years and how he got so evil. I couldn’t do that. It wasn’t smart enough, after all. Twenty minutes

later, I thought: “Who else is really evil?”, and then an image came up into my brain from the film. That green-skinned witch who was saying magic spells and I thought to myself:”Jesus Mary Joseph, I just had an inspiration!. Everybody knows who this witch is, everybody in the world, but nobody knows anything about her. I knew the book *The Wizard of Oz*, I knew that the author had not said anything about her, he hadn’t even given her a name. They just called her the “Wicked witch” but everybody knew what she looked like, everybody knew what she had done and I thought:”That’s a perfect chance for me to take a character who is evil and to examine from the beginning what happens to her to make her behave in the way that she does. So, you see, to return to your question, I didn’t really choose to rewrite *The Wizard of Oz*. I chose to write about evil in a novel. *The Wizard of Oz* was just luck. It was a lot of luck, it was a good idea but the idea was about evil and the idea was about how would I recognize evil if I had it in my own heart. It would be a good thing to ask myself that question before I get into trouble.

So, I won’t answer any question that long. I can talk short too but these two were both very important questions.

**Stavrianna :** How did you feel when you heard that a play based on your book was going to be performed?

**Maguire :** The question is how did I feel when I heard that a play based on my book was going to be performed. Well, the first thing I thought is “I don’t believe it”. However, the person who wrote the music, Stephen Schwartz, was somebody whose work I admired pretty much and when my lawyer called me to say :”Well, it’s a writer named Stephen Schwartz”, I said : “I know who Stephen Schwartz is, I never met him but I know who he is”. Now, there was already a plan to make a movie, not a musical, not a play, but a movie, and it had been in Hollywood for about four years. One script after another had been presented. They were all terrible. Each one was worse than the one before and I was not happy as I didn’t have money to feed my children. The movie was in development and nobody was sure how it was going to work, nobody in Hollywood really liked the film script. Then, the composer Stephen Schwartz came to Hollywood, he knocked on the door of the director of the film and said :”May I talk to you privately?”. The director said:”Yes” and Stephen Schwartz closed the door and said that everybody in Hollywood knows the movie stinks. The script is bad. It’s not going to be a good film. The producer of the film said:”Yes, I know. That’s

true, it stinks” and Stephen Schwartz said: “I know what’s wrong with it”. The producer said: “What?”. The composer said: “It needs music” and the producer thought about it. Stephen said: “Everybody knows that people in Oz sing, that’s what they do. You chose to make a dramatic movie, where nobody is singing, but ever since 1939, when Judy Garland sang *Over the rainbow* for the first time and went to Oz and all the people in Oz sing, we expect people in Oz to sing”. So, he said: “I have a proposal for you. Why don’t you get the movie company to put some money into developing it as a play?”. The producer said: “That’s a great idea. I always wanted to have work on Broadway, but it’s up to Gregory. He owns the material. You have to persuade him. So, Stephen Schwartz came to Connecticut and we went for a meeting in the woods. We both wore hats like this and we were talking about what it was going to be. He was very nervous, because he knew that we could make a lot of money but he said: “Your story needs to be a play. It would be better as a play. I said: “Why?”. He said: “Well, for two reasons. For one thing, your story has a real heroine, somebody who is really good, somebody who is old-fashioned. The book is full of old-fashioned questions and old-fashioned notions about courage and Elphaba is a character full of feeling. In a movie she would have to be reticent. She couldn’t speak her feeling all the time and it would be hard to show her feeling, but imagine: in a play she could be all alone, the music could be just behind her, everybody on stage could leave, she could walk right on the edge of the stage and music could come up to support her emotion and she could open her mouth and sing almost as a shakespearean monologue, a soliloquy. She could sing the most important things that are in her heart. “Unlimited.....my future is unlimited....” and she could sing for herself”. So, this was very persuasive to me. I love to sing. I know what the power of music is and I know what a good voice can do to convey strong emotion. So, I said to myself: “I think that will work”. Five years later, it was put on Broadway and I went to the opening and when Elphaba came out and began to sing, the first time she went out, the audience started to shout and clap. They didn’t even know the story yet, but they were so happy to see her as a character. They were on her side before she even had her first spoken line, before she opened her mouth and I thought to myself: “This is going to work. This might not be a success. The critics might not like it, but people are going to get it”. So it was pretty exciting to me.

(At that point Ashley Bryan encouraged the children to sing and they all decided to sing the song “Popular”).

**Maguire** (thrilled): That's really wonderful. I can't tell you how wonderful it is. I'm good with words, but I'm not that good. I'm really very pleased. Thank you so much. Do you have any other questions?

**Dimitris** : Your book doesn't end in a happily-ever-after way. Many books do end that way, though. What is your opinion about those books?

**Maguire** : That's a good question. The question is that my book doesn't end in a happily-ever-after way and yet many books do, many books aim towards happily-ever-after as a way of signaling that they're done, so what is my feeling about that kind of an ending? As a person who reads books, I love it when they end happily, that's what I would want, but even more than I want happiness, I want honesty and it seems to me that, as a writer, I try to trick you into believing in a magic land where people can do magic, there are talking animals, but I try to be as honest as I can about human beings, about the human experience. Let's face it! Happiness with luck comes to all of us, maybe, many times in our lives, but we cannot deny that sorrow comes many times too. In order for you to believe in Oz, of all strange places with dragons and prophecies and witches, I need to make you believe in a land by making you first believe in the characters, believe that the amount of courage and torture and regret and valor they have is the same as that which you have or I have or anybody here has. I wanted most of all to be honest. Now, I will tell you that so many people have liked this book, that I have done two other books about the characters. One of them is called *Son of a Witch* and the next one is called *A Lion among Men*. But there's going to be one more book and it will come out in about six months and I have the cover here to show you. And this is the end not just of one book but of four books. This is the end of my time in Oz and the temptation to end it extremely happily is very very strong, but I want to continue to be honest all the way through to the very last page and to say that in any moment of our lives there's a capacity for happiness and a capacity for sorrow, sometimes in the very same moment. If you're going to keep believing in everything that I write, I have to be honest with you.

**Marina K.** : Did you follow all the rehearsals of Broadway from the beginning to the end?

**Maguire** : The question is did I follow the development of a play on Broadway from the very beginning to the very end and the answer is no. I chose not to. I could have said I wanted to write a play, but I decided that

the play had the best chance of success if it didn't have me leaning over the desk and yelling at everybody trying to change my ideas. The people who made the play are used to making plays. I'm used to writing novels. Besides, I based my story on an old story, *The Wizard of Oz*, and the person who wrote that story didn't come up out of the grave to say you can't do that to Glinda, you can't do that to Elphaba. Nobody bothered me from the grave. They let me do my work and I thought it was only fair to let the people in the theatre do their work. That might sound very noble of me, but I was only trying to protect myself. If the play was going to be a big success, I could say "Oh, yes, of course, it's a wonderful book" and I could own the success of the play. If the play was going to be a big failure, I could say "Oh! I didn't write it, so don't blame me!". So I was trying to protect myself by keeping a distance. That's why it was exciting to walk in the theatre and see Elphaba flying up at the end of Act I, when she rises up in the air. I was as excited as everybody else in the theatre. I didn't know what was going to happen. So, it was a great deal of fun for me and it was also good to be able to put it away, when I'm done with it and move on to the next book.

**Melina :** If you wrote this book today, would you make the characters any different?

**Maguire :** That's a great question. If I wrote this book today, would I make the characters any different? I don't believe I would, but I think that I would probably make it a shorter book. This was my first novel for adults. I had written books for children and books for readers your age, but I had not had the practice of writing a novel for grown-ups yet, so I threw everything that I cared about in the world into this one book. If I could write the book today, that I have more confidence as a writer, I would not feel that I needed to stuff it with everything I knew and cared about, but I think the plot would be pretty much the same.

**Marina S.:** Does the character of Elphaba have any similarities to yours?

**Maguire :** Does the character of Elphaba have any similarities to me? Well, it's a mystery of the human character.

**Marina S. :** I mean Elphaba of the play and Elphaba in your book.

**Maguire :** Well, sometimes when I think about it and I seek courage, I think "What would Elphaba do?" , "What would Elphaba do in this situation?" and then I remember that I made up Elphaba and I put the courage that I

honour in her as a character so it's strange that I have to look in my book to discover how to be brave, but characters are a mystery. There's a lot of Elphaba in me, I think. I like to think she is smart and I like to think I try to pay attention to what's important so I think those are the same. I think that she, because of her skin, feels a little bit off to one side, never in the middle, always on the margin and I think I felt like that in some parts of my life. She tried to kill somebody but I haven't tried to kill anybody yet. So, in that part I would like to say that we are not very much alike.

**Lydia** : Since your childhood, did you always want to become a writer?

**Maguire** : Since my childhood, did I always want to become a writer? Well, the first thing I wanted in childhood was... when my mother would say "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I would say an elephant and she would say "No, you would have to be a person!" so then I say "I want to own a greek restaurant" and that's true because my grandfather owned a greek restaurant and even when he was dead I thought it sounded fun and then I could eat all the food I wanted. I was a very little child and food is important for children. But, at the time I was about 8 or 9, I realized what my heart desired at that age. My heart's desire was to be free. I didn't want to work in an office, where I would have to go everyday at the same time and do the same job, and the easiest way I could imagine to be free would be to do something that nobody else could do and so be my own boss and that's what an artist is. An artist, even if he/she is a poor artist, he/she is still free if he/she can choose what to do. Freedom has to be with choice, having choices. So I decided to be an artist of some sort. When I was 8 or 9, I drew, I wrote stories and I made up plays and I designed buildings and anything I could think of. I loved to make things up and I still do. Do you like to make things up?

**Lydia** : Yes, I do!

**Maguire** : And there's a lot of freedom in there, isn't there? How many of you are writers? How many like to write? I see a lot of people raising their hands, but Lydia, you people say, loves to write the most. I want to ask a question, then. What is it that pushes you to run for the computer or the computer screen or to run for a paper and a pencil? What is it that makes you want to write? That's a hard question. You might have to think about it for a year and then send me a letter. But it's a good question to ask.



**Lydia** : I usually write things that I can't say to somebody.

**Maguire** : A lot of things that you can't say to anybody. That's a very good reason. Yes, that's a great reason. Thank you for saying that. Is there anybody else who wants to tell us why he/she writes.

**Aliki** : With writing you can express some emotions that you can't say to a friend or to a person. You feel that you just want to write.

**Maguire** : With writing you can express some emotions that you can't say to a friend. Writing is like a half-way point between me and you. I could write and put something there and you could write and put something there and we could read what each other had written, but we didn't have to say it directly. That's a very good reason too and when one writes a book that's what he/she exactly is doing. One is talking to all the people that he/she will never meet, even to people who haven't been born yet, even to people who will read your book after you die. You're still talking to them. There's a meeting place somewhere in-between. What you wanted to say and what they are ready to hear. So, that's a wonderful reason for writing. Keep it up!

**Aliki**: We could say that as a writer, you write fantasy stories but as a reader what do you prefer reading?

**Maguire** : The question is that as a writer I prefer fantasy stories, which is true, but as a reader what do I prefer? Maybe, the best answer I can give to that question is that I prefer to be surprised and what I mean is any story that is going to surprise me by the nerviness of the writer, any story which will carry me along giving me things that I didn't necessarily expect, maybe I didn't even want to hear. That's the writer that I'd love to be. And a writer who writes stories about modern-day times or stories about ancient times or stories about the future, a writer who writes about the family life of a family of foxes or fantasy with dragons and centaurs, anyone of those forms can still surprise and can enlarge the reader, open up the reader. So, I don't have a preference. I like realistic stories. I like fantasy. I just don't like stories that are boring. They just have to surprise me.

**Niki** : When you finally saw the musical, was it the way you had imagined the story or was it different?

**Maguire** : When I finally saw the musical, was it the way I had imagined the story or was it different? It was different in some ways. In order to make the

story work on the stage, it had to be shorter. A lot of characters that were in my book are gone, and the story had to be a little nicer. The character of Elphaba had to be more like a saint, so she made mistakes but she wasn't ever cross or angry on the stage, or when she was angry, she was only angry at people who deserved it. In real life, we often get angry at people who don't deserve it at all. That's because we are angry at ourselves and we take it out of somebody else. So, on the stage I saw someone who was a little bit too perfect, but still likeable, admirable; and at the end of the play, the last two minutes, something happens on the stage that doesn't happen in my book. It has to do with a trap-door where the scarecrow goes and that doesn't happen in my book and the first time I saw that, my blood pressure dropped because I thought "Oh! No, they did a good work and now they've ruined it in the last possible minute". But I saw the play about five times. The first time I saw the play, people booed at that moment, as they thought it was sentimental, but the more I thought about it, the more accustomed to the idea I became, because the story that they chose to put on the stage was about this romantic friendship between Glinda and Elphaba. At the end of that play Glinda and Elphaba are drawn apart for ever, they will never see each other again and that is the same as a death. Once I realized that the play was talking about death too, the death of a friendship and what needed to be cherished in memory, I thought the play got to the same place that I got too in my novel and just took a different path. And as soon as I realized that the emotions were the same, then I stopped booing.

If there aren't any other questions I would like to move on to the signing of your books and posters. Thank you very much! It was great fun talking to you!