When most people hear the word “wicked,” they usually think of the synonym of the word. They would think about evil and scary things when that word comes around. To others, the word could make them think of the musical or the book that inspired the musical. *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire is all about the beginning of a very “wicked” life for the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*. As an audience to the story of Dorothy, readers already know that Elphaba will become the Wicked Witch, but what the audience may wonder is if she chose her own way or not. Maguire uses our knowledge of the Witch to give a different perspective of her. This perspective is one in which gives the readers a chance to look at the Witch differently. She may not be so wicked as people thought. Throughout the story, we see Elphaba given choices that would change her life drastically, even though many religions within Oz say that there are certain paths set for everyone. At the beginning of the book, the readers are told that she will become this evil person, but it is her actions throughout the book that make her who she is in the end. Her own free will make her become the Wicked Witch, when the beginning of the book gives readers reasons that it would be predestination.

Predestination is usually discussed when it comes to religion in our society. What people normally define predestination is, “the action of God in foreordaining from eternity whatever comes to pass” (“Predestination…”). Although this term is usually used in religion, there may be people that believe in it without the thought of any God making people’s actions. Another term that people can call predestination is fate. Many people do believe that fate guides us in our lives, not just God.
The big point to which free will is mostly related is the different religions of Oz. In most religions in this world, people believe that God has given them a set plan for life and it is mostly predestination that happens throughout life. Others will think that free will is what drives life on; God does not set a plan for people. People can believe in predestination without practicing any religion at all. All of the religions that are mentioned within the book, make Elphaba out to be a certain person who’s fates line with these religions.

The first religion that is recognized within this book is Unionism, because Elphaba’s father is a minister who tries to have people converted through his traveling. Unionism is much like the religion of Christianity right now. Unionism believes in the Unnamed God that does just what God is intended to do. He made the world that is now Oz and the people who practice this religion believe in predestination. What Frex, Elphaba’s father, does to help the situation that he finds himself with Elphaba, is to go around and say that she was a demon but now believes in the Unnamed God. This can show that at the beginning of the book, Maguire is showing readers that Frex could believe that she was always meant to be born evil, and that she will become evil when she grows.

Another religion that could be used as one that makes Elphaba’s fate to be predestined is Lurlinism. Lurlinism is a faith that could be considered to be more of a “pagan” religion than any other. Paganism is a different kind of religion that is not discussed much in this society. One of the best ways that it could be defined is to say that Paganism is closely related to folk practices and superstitions (Palmer, 405). This religion is based off of the Queen of the Fairies, named Lurline, making Oz become a “fairy
country.” The people who practice this religion believe that Queen Fairy Lurline is the main reason that there are both Animals and animals.

The story goes as, “When Lurline let loose, the animals thought the raging stream was a flood, sent to drown their fresh new world, and they despaired of their existence…Those who became intimidated and turned back remained animals…Those who swam on and made it to the farther shore were given the gifts of consciousness and language” (147-148). By this religion, it could be believed that Elphaba could be the Princess Ozma that is to rule Oz. The reason that she could be the next Oz is because her mother came from a upper family, that is not explained much. When the mother dies, the dying mother usually, she gives a “spark” to her daughter to be able to rule Oz.

The other religion that could show the readers how Elphaba could fit into is the Pleasure Faith. The best way to describe the Pleasure Faith is to let the reader know that the people who practice it are looking for quick gratification. They do not want to worship something; so instead, they live in sin without calling it sin. The Pleasure Faith believes in the Kumbric Witch. She is the one who they believe made the Animals apart from the animals by a spell that she made. As with all witches, she is the only religious figures that does magic. The way that Elphaba could be the second-coming of the Kumbric Witch is that she has magical abilities without managing to think about them. While she studied Science at Shiz, near the end of the book she finds that she can do magic while she did not study it at all.

Besides the religion aspect of having predetermination for Elphaba, there are those characters that tell her who she will or can be. At the very beginning, where she is born, there is an actual element of predestination for Elphaba. When the Clock of the
Time Dragon comes into town, the citizens of the town that Elphaba lives finds out that Frex and Melena have a monster of a baby that will be born. Because they saw this, the people of the town try to kill both of her parents because they are afraid of how Elphaba will turn out. What becomes ironic in this scene is that Elphaba ends up almost the Clock’s baby because Melena gives birth to her inside of it. When the women that help Melena out see Elphaba for the first time, they describe her as being some monster. The women describe her, “‘I think it’s rotten,’ said the fishwife, and checked for the root of a tail, counted fingers and toes. ‘It smells like dung’” (Maguire, 27). By what these women have described about her, it sounds that she looks evil and could and will be a monster.

Another presence that gives Elphaba a chance to have her life set for is Madame Morrible. After attending Shiz University after a while, Elphaba, Glinda, and Nessarose all are invited to speak with. Madame Morrible thought that the women were good enough to be a part of the Wizard’s police, in a way. She discussed how the Wizard needs women to help him out and how the girls will be great with helping the Wizard out. She talks to Elphaba as saying that through Elphaba’s spirit alone, she could help the Wizard out, “‘You have shown no sign of interest in sorcery and I don’t claim you have any natural aptitude. But your splended lone-wolf spit and spirit can be harnessed, oh yes it can, and you needn’t live a life of unfulfilled rage’” (Maguire, 203).

One of the first people that meet Elphaba is Turtle Heart from Quadling Country. He is a glassblower that has the power to see many things through his glass artwork. When she was very little, Turtle Heart gave Elphaba a glass lens for her to look at because he knew that whole things do not have her attention. What Turtle Heart sees in Elphaba, but cannot speak it directly to her, is the fact that she can see many things
within his glass as well. Although Turtle Heart did not mean to have Elphaba be destined for something, in a way it shows how truly powerful she is. Without trying, she saw things that Turtle Heart could see. This could determine how powerful she would be when she becomes older in the book.

One of the last people to talk to Elphaba and perhaps making her a set path is Princess Nastoya of the Scrow tribe. Princess Nastoya is actually an Animal that can distort herself to looking like a human. When she talks to all of the travelers, she manages to have them tell the truth on their travels. She is a powerful being that could be explained by magic but is not discussed about. When she comes to talk to Elphaba she talks as if Elphaba is under a spell, which she very much could be. In the way that Nastoya could have given Elphaba the final set path in front her. Nastoya tells Elphaba that she will hide and be a witch. She discusses with Elphaba how they both have the same enemy, although never discussed, is probably the Wizard and his “police.”

Although Nastoya does discuss the fact that she has a plan for Elphaba, she does discuss that not everything is set in stone. It may seem condescending at first, because Nastoya did just tell Elphaba that she will be a witch. What she did not say, was whether Elphaba will be a good or bad witch. Nastoya does give her crows, which can represent death and darkness, but they could be used as something different besides darkness if Elphaba really wanted them to. Nastoya wants to show Elphaba that it is about how she chooses to act and be perceived. There could be a set path, but it will not matter without her choices. In the best words, Nastoya tells Elphaba, “Remember this: Nothing is written in the stars. Not these stars, nor any others. No one controls your destiny” (Maguire, 308). Perhaps Elphaba only remembered the part where Nastoya tells her that
she will be a witch. In the end, she has become half crazed from lack of sleep and being alone with only a few people to keep her company.

Another instance in which Elphaba is shown that there is no real destiny to her life or any other is when she sees the Clock of the Time Dragon when she has just found Madame Morrible dead. The play that the dwarf shows Elphaba is in three acts and in Act Two: The Birth of Evil, she is the one in which is born. Once again, it seems that the Clock is trying to give her a path of wickedness in front of her. Yet, for the third act, the end of the play, there was nothing. Elphaba asks where the end is, but the dwarf answers back saying that the end was never written. That her life, does not have a specific end. It cannot be something that can be predicted.

The other way in which the book shows that Elphaba is able to make her own choices in her life deal with the conversation that the three girls have with Madame Morrible. Morrible manages to put a binding spell on the girls so that they cannot talk about what they had just heard to anybody else, but Elphaba manages to somehow trick that spell. She instead, goes to the Wizard to discuss what he is doing to Oz and why. Although she does no talk about the discussion with Morrible, it is known by the reader that the meeting was the last straw to go see him in the flesh. She did not want to follow him or any other person in her life, and by her going to see him, it shows.

To go with the ideas of predestination and free will within Wicked, there may be a point in which the reader can tell that Elphaba has begun to reach self-abandonment. Although she does not have any faith whatsoever, the term in which self-abandonment is describes what Elphaba may be doing in the end of the book. The term is described as, “...In the latter case, the impression of forsakenness can involve intense
suffering…Self-abandonment, so understood, is the act, or series of acts, of surrendering unconditionally to the will of God” (Munzer, 747). Of course because Elphaba does not have a true faith, it seems that she surrenders herself to fate in a way. After her sister dies because of Dorothy, she begins to lose her wits. She tries to get Dorothy so that she can have her sister’s shoes, and so she has abandoned most of who she is to finally have her sister’s shoes and to see why Dorothy had to be in Oz.

What could be discussed is the fact that through the Wizard’s own acts, he has killed his only daughter. It may have been fate or just his actions that have done this, but what really matters is that he never felt the same after finding out that Elphaba was his daughter. So, through his acts, he created his own fate of death around him. Elphaba, through her actions, created her fate of becoming misunderstood by all that see or talk to her.

Through *Wicked*, it feels as if Gregory Maguire is trying to tell the readers that everybody has a set path in front of him or her, but it is the choices that are made that can change everything within life. In an interview, Maguire states that he wanted to have more philosophical ideas in the book. He states, “I knew that the book would engage in philosophical enquiry. I doubted that a decisive conclusion could be drawn about the nature of evil and, indeed, the book mirrors that early assumption” (Cupery). There are so many ideas within the book that are almost as important to the real world. This is why free will and predestination are in this book as well.

Since most people like to think that free will and predestination are more of a religious side, one section from the book manages to question religion. So if Maguire writes like he questions the religion, the two ideas of free will and predestination would
not be such big ideas within the book. What is written is this, “The history of peopels who have shucked off religion isn’t an especially persuasive argument for living without it. Is religion itself - that tired and ironic phrase - the necessary evil?” (Maguire, 495). By this passage, it is definitely seen that Maguire is really questioning any person’s beliefs in religion. Predestination does not seem so important to anybody without religion. It would all just be choices made by everybody that guide lives around. Nothing sets a path in a real life.

Through Elphaba’s questioning of religion, we see a glimpse of who Maguire really is. While discussing certain issues pertaining to children’s book, Maguire notes how he likes to write his books without religious qualities. He notes, “…books that show me characters occasionally daring to wrestle with the difficulties of belief, characters who also trust in the keen tool of doubt—well, these are books I return to as a reader, comforted in my squirmy indecisive yearning humanity. They are books I try to emulate as a writer. They leave the question open, but they don’t shy at asking the question in the first place” (Maguire).

Right at the beginning of the book, we do get to see how predestination could work in the hands of how Elphaba does end up evil. Yet, as we go on toward the meat of the story, we see that things have changed and Elphaba has her own choices in mind. She could end up in so many places if she decided to live the lives that were planned for her. Instead, she questioned all of the faiths that her path set out, and instead made choices that she wanted to make. In the end it may have ended badly for her, yet we fully understand who she is through her inner dialogue when thinking about these different religions in Oz.
Everyone believes in predestination and free will in some way or another. Through *Wicked*, readers can see that one of the main ideas of the story is whether or not Elphaba’s life was destined to happen that way or was it because she chose it. There are many instances in which her life could have been destined, but no one wants to take a route in which he or she is not the driver. In this case, Elphaba chooses her own path, making different twists in turns into an end that is unfavorable to her. Through Maguire’s realistic characters and their questioning of faith, readers can see the flaws that religions that we as a society have now. It is as if free will and predestination should be able to cancel each other out in the end. People live their lives by the choices they make. If certain people make the choice of believing a certain faith and following it, they should be proud of what they have chosen. No one in our society will be able to have a life quite like Elphaba’s, where there are many paths set out at the beginning for her. Some people are actually born for a certain purpose but they have the abilities to change these paths. Everyone can change a path by one simple choice, Elphaba did exactly that.

Overall, there were many religions among Oz that could prophesize that Elphaba was someone that was different from the beginning of her life. Through certain people, she was told that a certain way to live was better, such as visiting Nastoya and listening to her when saying that she would be a witch in hiding. She did listen to Nastoya for the most part, but it seems she forgot to watch all of her actions carefully to avoid getting hurt. Also, there were many instances in which free will was mentioned towards Elphaba at different time within the story. We will all make certain choices that could disrupt certain events in our lives, but as readers of *Wicked*, we need to remember that each decision affects another. Gregory Maguire may have made that one tiny idea into his
book, but it should be known by everyone.
Works Cited


