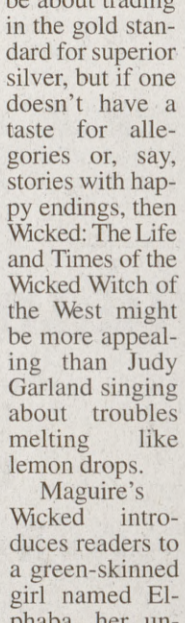


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WRITER'S BLOCK

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West
 Gregory Maguire
 Published by Reganbooks

Sure, Frank L. Baum's classic tale of wicked witches, an innocent farm girl and an eventful trip down the Yellow Brick Road was supposed to



be about trading in the gold standard for superior silver, but if one doesn't have a taste for allegories or, say, stories with happy endings, then *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* might be more appealing than Judy Garland singing about troubles melting like lemon drops. Maguire introduces readers to a green-skinned girl named Elphaba, her unfaithful, alcoholic mother; fanatical religious father; beautiful, but armless sister, and freedom fighter-younger brother, leaving the reader to think, "With relatives like these..." After growing out of shark-like baby teeth and getting through a stint as a missionary working with her father in the Quadling badlands, Elphaba is sent to a university to make something of herself. There she boards with Galinda (perhaps more familiar as Glinda, the good witch),

a prima donna social climber who could not be less thrilled about living with such an outcast.

At the university, Elphaba continually fights with the head mistress, Madame Morrible, and begins secret research with Dr. Dillamond, a goat biologist who is trying to discover the link between animals and Animals (an Animal has the capacity for spo-

ken language and thought) before the Wizard takes away all Animal rights. Dr. Dillamond's eventual murder and Madame Morrible's coverup of the crime initiates Elphaba into a world of conspiracy that changes her life, coloring her against all authority figures and making her a radical misanthrope, hellbent on getting revenge against the Wizard and Morrible.

Elphaba is strange. She is overly standoffish. She has an unreasonable fear of water. However, she is no evil witch. OK, she does want to rid Munchkinland of that troublesome Dorothy character, but only because Dorothy took the shoes promised to her by her sister. Plus, the Wizard — the hapless character of Baum's classic is *Wicked's* evil despot who regulates the kingdom of Oz with the terrifying Gale Force — killed her lover and regulated her Animal

friends to mere livestock.

Elphaba is not the warmest of characters ever written, but she is undeniably human. Maguire's elegant prose and careful crafting of her character allows the reader to understand her without pitying her plight. Some might call it sympathy for the devil, but her demise in *Wicked* is a remark concerning more

the tragic end of an embittered young woman than the courageous death of a murderous of a tyrant.

With *Wicked*, readers may be presented with the character of Elphaba, but the image that keeps surfacing is one of humanity itself. (Grade: B+)

— Beverly Mireles

Crime and Punishment
 Fyodor Dostoyevsky
 Published by Bantam Classics

Philosophers as far back as Plato and as recent as the Marquis DeSade have questioned the value of human life and the possible justifications for crime, but nowhere are the questions brought to life as well as in Dostoyevsky's classic *Crime and Punishment*.

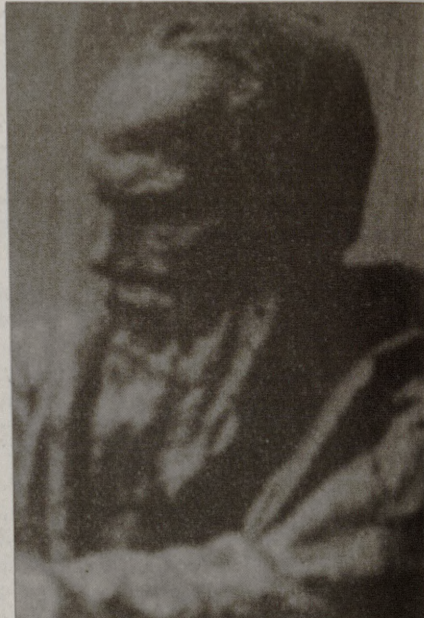
In the novel, set in 19th century St. Petersburg, a young former college student named Raskolnikov murders a pawnbroker in order to redistribute her wealth. In the planning stage of the crime, he sees it as a justified killing. After all, she makes her living on the misfortunes of others, so is it not just to rid the world of her? While the answer to this question seems clear to Raskolnikov in the beginning, as the novel progresses, he struggles with his conscience and periods of madness stemming from his paranoid fear of discovery.

The imagery in the novel is augmented by Raskolnikov's grinding poverty and the sacrifice his sister is willing to make for him: marrying a rich man to free the family from debt.

The deeper questions about human nature and morality

notwithstanding, this novel is an excellent read with no unimportant scenes and never-ending suspense. The only real drawback is that the events tend to be slightly repetitive and that the Russian names present some problems in remembering who all of the characters are. Readers would be well-served to keep a notebook handy to jot down some of the characters' names and roles. (Grade: A-)

— Jason Bennyhoff



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|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| A = Literary classic | D = Don't buy it |
| B = A cut above | F = Waste of paper |
| C = Passable reading | |

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