TURUN YLIOPISTO

“Composite Creatures”

Monstrous Women and the Nonhuman in Gregory Maguire’s *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*

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In my thesis I employ ecofeminist theory to analyse Gregory Maguire's novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1996). As women's subordination has been justified by their conflation with nonhuman nature, feminism's relationship to the concept of nature has often been troubled. However, Plumwood (1993) and Alaimo (2000) propose that the woman-nature connection can be reutilised in a manner that does not resort to essentialism.

Several scholars have found that Wicked addresses culturally well-established tropes of witches and monstrous women in a subversive manner. In addition, I argue that earth, plant and animal metaphors are employed in a manner that rearticulates the woman-nature confluence. The novel's use of metaphoric language associates Elphaba and her body with earth, animals and plant life. However, this affinity with nonhuman nature does not reduce Elphaba to the established tropes of naturalised women or reduce her agency.

My analysis concerns also the anthropomorphic Animals in the novel. Both Elphaba and animals can be understood as hybrid characters inhabiting liminal positions. However, while hybridity is employed in the novel to break solid categories, it is not depicted as inherently virtuous or unproblematic, but as something that may coexist with ethical issues and violence.

Key words: ecofeminism, anthropomorphism, hybridity, monsters

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1 Introduction

The witch is a stock villain in many classic European fairy tales. Portrayed as an aberrant and malicious woman with magical powers, she is often starkly contrasted to innocent, virtuous heroines. If fairy tales, as is often asserted, function as models on which children construct their worldview, the witch represents the antithesis of an ideal woman, an object of horror and a cautionary example. At the end of the fairy tale, she is almost invariably destroyed, frequently in an imaginatively violent manner, pushed into an oven or made to dance in hot metal shoes.

L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) is widely considered "the first uniquely American fairy tale", "the classic American fairy tale" or "American myth" (Riley 1997, 3; Burger 2009, 5). Like earlier traditional European fairy tales, *The Wizard of Oz* also builds a stark contrast between good and evil female characters. While Dorothy and Glinda the Good Witch are depicted as unambiguously good, the Wicked Witch of the West is wholly monstrous, the archetypal wicked witch in American cultural consciousness and by extension global popular culture. Like her European predecessors, the American Wicked Witch meets a violent end, her body literally melting away when Dorothy throws a bucket of water on her, a cause of celebration among the people of Oz.

Gregory Maguire's ([1995] 1996) *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (subsequently referred to as *Wicked*) complicates this rather polarised dichotomy of good and evil. It is a palimpsest or rewriting based on Baum's classic Oz books, particularly the first one, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), while containing several references to Baum's other Oz novels. Baum's Oz mythos has been adapted and retold in numerous other works, undoubtedly the most famous among them the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer musical film *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming and Vidor, dir., 1939). This film is also the reference point to many central elements in Maguire's novel, such as the Witch's green skin, which is not mentioned in Baum's works.

Maguire's *Wicked* tells, as its title suggests, the life story of Wicked Witch of the West, the villain of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. However, the Witch of Maguire's novel, renamed Elphaba after the initials of L. Frank Baum, is not a flat villain but a multi-dimensional, 'round' and dynamic character (Burger 2009, 10). Unlike Baum's Oz, the Oz in Maguire's novel is not an idyllic fantasy country but a land fraught with political tensions and

conflicts of interest (Gray 2007, 171–172). The genre of the novel, in turn, is not children's literature but adult fantasy, as it engages with complex philosophical and political themes, questioning clear-cut notions of good and evil (Ferrier-Watson 2017, 222).

Wicked covers the life of the Wicked Witch of the West, Elphaba Thropp, from her birth to her death. To the shock of her parents, Elphaba is born green-skinned, sharp-toothed and with an intolerance to water. At college, she begins to advocate for anthropomorphic animals or Animals, the rights of which are being repressed by the Wizard's autocratic regime. After the assassination of her mentor, an anthropomorphic goat named Dr. Dillamond, she leaves college and goes underground to practise direct action against the regime. Some years after this, she suffers a mental breakdown as state militia murder her lover, Fiyero, a prince from Vinkus, the western part of Oz. Elphaba recovers from the immediate shock of this event in a cloister for some years, after which she leaves for Fiyero's castle, Kiamo Ko, wishing to apologise to his widow, Sarima. She stays at Kiamo Ko for the rest of her life, where, as she faces more tragedy, she grows increasingly reclusive, jaded and mentally unbalanced. At the end of the novel, she is killed, like the Witch in Baum's novel, by Dorothy splashing a bucket of water on her. The narrative ends as she dies at the age of 38, never attaining her goals and leaving behind a complicated legacy largely based on fictionalised accounts of her life.

Just as *Wicked* rewrites Baum's Oz novels and the 1939 film, it also questions and re-appropriates established cultural tropes regarding witches, women, monstrosity and Otherness, forming a dialogical relationship to these tropes. According to Ferrier-Watson (2017, 220), in *Wicked* Maguire "actively plays on the conventions of the typical fairytale genre and subverts them at his discretion." The novel, Ferrier-Watson continues, draws on the loaded connotations of the word "witch", while at the same time transforming the Wicked Witch of the West into a full-fledged character that subverts the conventions of witches in American and European fairy tales (ibid.). Burger (2009, 233), in turn, finds that the novel engages in "negotiating and reimagining the mythology surrounding the witch in the traditional *Wizard of Oz* narrative, prompting a revisionist reading" as "good and evil intersect in the character of Elphaba, her agency, and the public construction of her identity" (ibid.).

As indicated above, Maguire's novel has often been studied as a palimpsest of *The Wizard of Oz*. Though this dimension of *Wicked* cannot be ignored, in this thesis I also analyse it as a novel in its own right, the meanings of which cannot all be traced back to Baum's works or the 1939 film. Many scholars have read the novel in the context of historical and cultural

ideas of witches, monsters and aberrant women. However, the role of nonhuman animals in *Wicked* has gained much less scholarly attention. While for instance Frohreich (2009, 136) and Warfield (2011, 36) have remarked on Elphaba's animalisation in the text, it is not the main focus of their analyses. In my reading of the novel, I draw on the pre-existing research on the novel, while incorporating ecofeminist and ecocritical approaches into my analysis. In particular, I examine the connections the novel makes between the Elphaba, nonhuman animals and nature, and how this relates to the way the novel interrogates the categories human and nonhuman.

In the Oz of Maguire's novel, there are two kinds of nonhuman animals. The animals spelled with lowercase initials are similar to the nonhuman animals that exist in reality, whereas the Animals spelled with uppercase initials are capable of human speech and have human-like mental capacities. Within the world of the novel, the distinction between the two groups is made in spoken language by a change in intonation, by "enunciating the capital letters" (*Wicked* 67). In this thesis, in addition to making the distinction by capitalisation, I sometimes use the qualifiers 'anthropomorphic' or 'non-anthropomorphic' when necessary or helpful for understanding. I have chosen these specific terms to avoid the anthropocentric bias present in terms such as 'sapient' or 'sentient', whereas relying entirely on capitalisation could be too confusing for the reader in the long term.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: in chapter 2, I shortly introduce the theoretical background I apply in my analysis, which I have divided into three chapters. In chapter 3, I discuss how Elphaba's character is compared to and affiliated with nonhuman animals and nature. In chapter 4, I examine the way the presence of anthropomorphic Animals in the novel complicates the boundaries of human and animal, as well as the connections between Animals and Elphaba. In chapter 5, I discuss the significance of hybridity and hybrid beings in the novel, along with the role of science and magic in it, considering the winged monkeys Elphaba creates. Finally, chapter 6 contains the concluding discussion of the thesis.

2 Theoretical Background

In my analysis of the interconnections between women, animals and nature in *Wicked* I draw primarily on ecofeminist theory. Particularly relevant to my discussion are Plumwood's (1994) analysis of hierarchical dualisms that enable the exploitation of both women and nonhuman nature, as well as Alaimo's (2000) ideas as to how the woman–nature association can be reutilised in a subversive manner in the context of literature. I also draw on some posthuman feminist theorists that share some common ground with ecofeminism, such as Braidotti (2017) and Lykke (1996a/1996b). This chapter functions as an introduction to my theoretical framework. In addition to ecofeminist theory, I shortly cover the concepts monster and hybrid, as they prove central to some points of my thesis.

2.1 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism or ecological feminism is a branch of feminist theory that is concerned with interconnections between the exploitation of women and nonhuman nature. It has its roots in the women's and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 marked the beginning of the Western ecological movement, while the Second Wave of feminism had developed from the early 1960s onwards as a critique of women's subordinate position in society and culture (Gaard 2011, 27). Ecofeminist approaches developed in the 1980s as a response to both mainstream Second Wave feminism and the "manstream" of the ecological movement, ecofeminists finding the former insufficiently interested in the subordination of nonhuman animals and nature and the latter overtly male-centric and male-dominated in terms of both theory and praxis (Birkeland 1993, 15).

The basic premise of ecofeminism is that the concepts 'woman' and 'nature' are in some way connected. However, there are significant differences as to how this connection is understood and articulated. Some ecofeminists view the woman–nature connection as innate and essential, while others see it as culturally and historically constructed. The 'original' ecofeminism formulated in the 1980s has since come under criticism for the more essentialist strands it contained. Though these cultural feminist strands did not comprise the entire movement, in order to distance themselves from them many scholars have since avoided the term (Gaard 2011, 27). In recent years, however, the growth of fields such as ecocriticism,

human–animal studies, critical animal studies and posthumanism has seen the rediscovery of many ideas that ecofeminists developed.

Though not all patriarchal cultures rely on an association between women and nature, in Western cultures it has been a significant factor in enabling the subordination and exploitation of both (Plumwood 1994, 11). In line with the tradition of French poststructuralist feminism, ecofeminism views binary oppositions such as culture/nature, reason/matter, male/female and human/nonhuman as central to Western patriarchal thought (Plumwood 1994, 43). These dualisms function in hierarchical manner, defining the subordinate party as the antithesis of the dominant party, its meaning fully dependent on and oppositional to it. In this manner, "woman is constructed as the other, as the exception, the aberration or the subsumed, and man treated as the primary model" (Plumwood 1994, 32), while to be defined as nature is to be defined as "a terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings" (Plumwood 1994, 4). As these dualisms are interlinked, in this framework, the concept of 'woman' is equated with nature, animality, irrationality, matter, and the body, while the concept of 'man' is equated with culture, humanity, rationality, technology, and the mind (Birkeland 1993, 24; Plumwood 1994, 45).

A question that has often proved troublesome to ecologically aware feminists and other so-called emancipatory critics is the issue of how to effectively resist the animalisation and dehumanisation of marginalised human populations without simultaneously reinforcing the human/nonhuman hierarchy. As Plumwood (1994, 28–27) outlines, one approach to this dilemma has been to assimilate the category 'woman' — or other marginalised group — into the category Human, while leaving the construction of the Human subject intact, not questioning its foundations. Another strategy has been to affirm the view of women as connected to nature and nature as irrational, only in a manner that reifies these qualities and rejects rationality. Neither of these solutions question the hierarchical dualisms at the core of the issue: the first strategy only expands the category of human while leaving the hierarchy between human and nature itself intact, while the latter merely inverts the hierarchy.

Rather than adopt either of these troubled strategies, Plumwood (1994, 10; 64) and Alaimo (2000, 190) argue for a strategy of "critical affirmation" or "critical reconstruction" of both women and nature. Due to the longstanding role of the woman–nature connection in justifying the subordination of women, the idea of 'nature' has proved a troubled terrain for feminism, serving as an object that must be repudiated to affirm women's inclusion to humanity (Alaimo

2000, 3–4). However, as Alaimo (2000, 4) remarks, this approach leaves nature as that which is "kept at bay — repelled — rather than redefined", serving as a mere mirror to what is considered as culture. Following Plumwood's (1993) thinking, Alaimo (2000, 13) argues that instead of either uncritically affirming the culturally constructed woman–nature connection or attempting to transcend nature, feminists can "transform the gendered concepts […] that have been cultivated to denigrate and silence certain groups of human as well as nonhuman life."

One possible site for the rearticulation of these concepts is literature. In *Wicked*, Elphaba is frequently identified with nonhuman nature and animals by metaphorical language. Furthermore, I find that the exploitation and Othering of anthropomorphic Animals parallels the exploitation and Othering of women in general and Elphaba in particular. As such, the zoomorphisation of Elphaba and the anthropomorphisation of Animals both serve to confound and complicate the divide between human and animal, culture and nature. In this respect the other focus of my analysis, hybridity, becomes relevant.

2.2 Hybrids and Monsters

In literary and cultural studies, the term hybrid is used to refer to various crossings of boundaries, as well as beings who exist on those boundaries. While the term has historically been employed in various discourses from horticulture and animal breeding to colonialist racism, its contemporary use was formulated by Homi K. Bhabha to understand the blending and intermixing of cultures in colonial and postcolonial settings in an affirmative manner (Camilleri & Kapsali 2020, 1). Behind this re-appropriation and recuperation of the concept of hybridity was poststructuralist critique of binary, fixed categories as a basis for identity politics (Papastergiadis [1997] 2015, 257). While Bhabha's formulation of hybridity was situated in the context of postcolonial studies, the term has since been adopted also by posthumanist scholars to examine various blends between humans, nonhuman animals and technology (Camilleri & Kapsali 2020, 2).

Hybridity is also relevant to the relatively new field of monster theory, the study of monsters in culture and arts. In this field, monstrosity is understood as a socially constructed category, the object of its study being "the means through which such subjects are "monsterized" and the implications of this process" (Weinstock 2020, 25). The category of 'monster' is thus understood as a discursive figuration that both serves to reflect cultural anxieties and to achieve social and political goals (ibid.). The concept 'monster' is keenly connected to the notion of hybridity. In various mythologies, monstrous beings are often pictured as hybrids or

chimaeras, blends of different species (Weinstock 2020, 9). As such, Cohen ([1996] 2020, 40) finds that monsters are "disturbing hybrids" whose bodies resist categorisation. Because of this "ontological liminality", monsters function as the "harbinger of category crisis", confounding settled divisions (ibid.).

The notion of monstrosity has historically been connected to multiple categories of Otherness. As such, it has also been of interest to feminist scholars. Garland-Thomson (2008, 21), for example, has paid attention to the ways both women and disabled people have been designated as monstrous and deviant in patriarchal and ableist discourses. Lykke (1996b, 15–16), following Bruno Latour's thinking on hybridity, argues that the concept of 'monster' functions as a remainder of the human/animal division. The modern separation between the two categories entails a particular hostility to monsters and hybrids due to their position as boundary figures. The attempt to preserve neat dichotomies and clearly outlined categories requires the repression of 'monstrous', hybrid forms. In reality, hybridity is the norm rather than a deviation, but maintaining dualistic constructions requires its denial and repression (Lykke 1996b, 17). The promises of the concepts 'hybrid' and 'monster' thus consist of their potential for confounding binary categories, functioning as an antidote to privileging 'pure' formulations and a way to understand blends of composite parts.

Due to their anthropomorphism, Animals in *Wicked* can be understood as hybrids of human and nonhuman animals. Elphaba's divergent body, likewise, is depicted in terms of monstrosity and hybridity. On a thematic level hybridity is deployed to confound dualistic constructions of human and nonhuman, culture and nature. At the same time, some hybrid boundary breakings may be violent, as I elaborate in chapter 5.

3 Monstrous Women and Nature

Many scholars have discussed how *Wicked* subverts and complicates age-old tropes of monsters and witches. The idea of a witch has long been synonymous with the concept of an aberrant and deviant woman, threatening the patriarchal social order. A term loaded with negative cultural baggage, it has functioned to enforce gendered norms, as women who stray from the designated feminine role risk being marked as monstrous, abject Others (Ferrier-Watson 2017, 219; Frohreich 2009, 124). Similarly, the culturally constructed association between women and nature has served to justify controlling women. In this chapter I consider how Wicked relates to the tropes of witches and monsters. Furthermore, I tie this aspect of the novel into the treatment of the tropes of feminised nature in it.

3.1 Witches as Monsters

The idea of the witch as a monstrous and aberrant woman is present in Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and its 1939 film adaptation. Frohreich (2009, 125) considers the fact that Baum's Oz also features good witches in addition to the traditional wicked ones, which was a novel idea in early 20th century children's fiction. In Baum's matriarchal Oz, powerful women are not necessarily evil. While this recuperation of the term 'witch' can be seen as a (proto-)feminist statement as such, the good witches in Baum's works bear little resemblance to the fairytale witches of old, instead being more akin to the fairy tale tropes of a good fairy or a princess. As Frohreich (2009, 126) notes, the wicked witches in Baum's Oz are still depicted along the lines of traditional fairy tale witches, as monstrous, Other, and bodily abnormal: the archetype of the wicked witch remains, even though the idea of a good witch is brought alongside it. This dichotomy of good and evil witches is further underscored in the 1939 film, in which Glinda tells Dorothy that "only bad witches are ugly" (Fleming and Vidor, dir., 1939) — a sentiment that can as well be understood as its syntactic reverse, that only ugly witches are bad.

As Burger (2009, 78–79) observes, in both versions of *The Wizard of Oz* the Wicked Witch is by different means coded as monstrous, abject and uncanny. Here Burger draws on Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, as well as Creed's ([1986] 2020) concept of the monstrous-feminine. In psychoanalytic theory, the uncanny and the abject both evoke horror, but while the uncanny is about something familiar becoming horrific and strange, the abject is an object onto which undesirable qualities are projected. The

self is established and defined against the abject, which in turn must be rejected, even violently (Burger 2009, 77; Creed [1986] 2020, 213). As Kristeva's primary example of the abject is the female body, particularly the maternal body, which the child rejects upon assimilating into the male-dominated world (Creed [1986] 2020, 217), the concept has also been utilised in feminist theory. Creed ([1986] 2020, 211) applies it in the formulation of the monstrous-feminine, a concept used for analysing cultural anxieties around women and the female body. In Creed's use of the concept, these anxieties are reflected in monstrous Others that may vary from mythological figures to popular culture characters.

Burger (2009, 79) considers specifically the Witch in the 1939 film to be the embodiment of Creed's monstrous-feminine. Particularly the Witch's green skin, which only appears in the film, functions as an obvious physical marker of her Otherness. Similarly, although the Witch's appearance is never described in detail in Baum's novel, Frohreich (2009, 129) finds that she is rendered inhuman by the fact that she is mentioned to have only one eye and "no blood in her veins." The description of the Witch melting into amorphous mass that Dorothy subsequently cleans up likens her to dirt, something that must be disposed of (ibid.). Moreover, according to Burger (2009, 76), the celebration following the Witch's death marks her as "irredeemably grotesque" within the narrative because "once the Wicked Witch has been coded as grotesquely uncanny and abject, any action against her is not only legitimized but also freed from the cultural taboos typically surrounding the celebration of death" (Burger 2009, 78).

Graham (2019, 7) sees these notions of the Witch as grotesque, abject and uncanny also in Maguire's *Wicked*, arguing that at many points in the novel, Elphaba's body is "set up as abject and monstrous." In the prologue of the novel, Elphaba overhears Dorothy's companions, the Tin Woodman, the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow discussing her:

> 'Of course, to hear them tell it, it is the surviving sister who is the crazy one,' said the Lion. 'What a Witch. Psychologically warped; possessed by demons. Insane. Not a pretty picture.
>
> 'She was castrated at birth,' replied the Tin Woodman calmly. 'She was born hermaphroditic, or maybe entirely male.' (Wicked 1)

Here Elphaba, merely referred to as the "Witch", is framed as monstrous, insane, and her physical sex and gender presentation are questioned. Over the course of the novel, the reader discovers that while most of these claims are wildly exaggerated rumours and speculation, some of them do converge with Elphaba's actual life story. After the prologue, the story

begins with Elphaba's birth. In addition to her green skin, Elphaba is born with sharp teeth and, it is implied, ambiguous genitalia. Her parents, Frex and Melena, are repulsed and alienated by the baby's abnormal physicality, and puzzled as to its possible cause, interpreting it variably as a curse, punishment or ill omen. The reader, also curious about the cause, becomes complicit in this questioning, attempting to decode Elphaba's bodily difference. In this manner Elphaba's body, as Frohreich (2009, 135–136) observes, becomes "a site on which conflicting meanings are projected and debated." While Nanny, Melena's old child maid, has a more practical approach to the green baby, she also speculates with the cause of Elphaba's colour:

> Was she half-elf? Was she punishment for her father's failure as a preacher, or for her mother's sloppy morals and bad memory? Or was she merely a physical ailment, a blight like a misshapen apple or a five-legged calf? (*Wicked* 31)

The explanations Nanny entertains for Elphaba's physical abnormality are strikingly similar to historical theories on the causes of so-called monstrous births, the births of human or animal children with physical abnormalities. Before the discovery of genetics these births were a subject of plenty of speculation and theorising. These theories are now gathered under the name teratology, the study of monstrosities (Weinstock 2020, 4). Weinstock (2020, 5–7) lists several of these proposed causes for monstrous births: since antiquity, such a birth could be seen as a portent of doom or a punishment, particularly for sexual immorality. According to what is sometimes called the theory of maternal impression, it could be caused by the pregnant woman's imagination or her experiences during the pregnancy. Alternatively, a monstrous child could simply be understood as an accident caused by some disturbance of the expected development, such as medical trauma or illness (Weinstock 2020, 11–12). One influential theory was that monstrous births were caused by 'miscegenation' or 'mixing of seed'. This included possible copulation with magical creatures or bestiality, resulting in hybridisation of species, a theory that remained widely accepted until the nineteenth century (Weinstock 2020, 8–9).

Most of these explanations are also featured in *Wicked* as potential explanations for Elphaba's bodily difference. On the day she is born, Frex announces that "[t]he devil is coming", referring to the Clock of the Time Dragon, a travelling magical puppet show. Melena berates him for this, telling him not to say such things when their child is about to be born. Later Frex thinks that these words may indeed have caused Elphaba's bodily abnormalities (*Wicked* 27). The fact that Elphaba is born inside the Clock of the Time Dragon, a magical puppet theatre

with a huge clockwork dragon on top, seems to contain a suggestion of the maternal impression theory, as a pregnant woman's encounter with an image of an animal was considered a possible cause for physical anomalies in the baby (Weinstock 2020, 11). Later Frex views Elphaba's difference as a curse, a punishment for his failures (*Wicked* 339). Nanny considers the option that it may just be a coincidence, "a blight like a misshapen apple or a five-legged calf" (*Wicked* 31). In the end, however, Nanny seems to prefer the explanation that "[p]erhaps [...] little green Elphaba chose her own sex, and her own color, and to hell with her parents" (ibid.). While this explanation perhaps amplifies Elphaba's agency to an unrealistic extent, it nevertheless values Elphaba's existence on her own terms, without either pathologizing or mystifying her bodily difference. Moreover, Nanny's formulation questions the need for a teratological account as such, Elphaba's body perhaps not needing to be explained so much as accepted as a fact of life.

Eventually the cause of Elphaba's difference is revealed to be an amalgamation of several of these explanations. Melena confides to Nanny that a mysterious stranger visited the house while Frex was away. Because of her drugged state during the visit, Melena is not fully able to recall the events. Though the precise nature of the encounter remains ambiguous in the text, it appears that the stranger drugged Melena and had sexual intercourse with her. Though Melena herself does not explicitly recognise what happened to her as rape, to me it seems to be implicated here. This echoes the theory of a monstrous child being a consequence of sin, particularly a sexual one, which is also insinuated in the recurring phrase "green as sin" in reference to Elphaba's skin tone (*Wicked*, 24; 116; 245). However, while historically the sexual sin in these contexts often meant sexual promiscuity on the behalf of the mother, in my reading the sin in question here could as well be the sin of rape on behalf of the man rather than Melena's own supposed promiscuity. Later in the novel it is revealed that this mysterious stranger is the man who would later become the Wizard of Oz, the primary antagonist of the novel. As the Wizard is not from Oz but from Earth, this makes Elphaba a hybrid between Ozian and Earthling. It seems that Elphaba's physical differences and magical abilities were caused by the green elixir, which when consumed has magical and hallucinogenic properties. I expand on this notion of hybridity in chapter 5.

Curiously, Melena seems nearly as upset by Elphaba being a girl as she is by her physical abnormalities. Before Elphaba is born, Melena feels certain that the baby will be a boy and is disappointed by Elphaba turning out to be female, almost as if her sex is just one more birth defect. The idea that women are defective men is an old one: Aristotle posited maleness as the

primary case of human development, femaleness being a monstrous anomaly, a defective or 'mutilated' version of the male standard (Garland-Thomson 2008, 18). In Western cultural history the female body has frequently been framed as monstrous and uncanny, evoking horror in the viewer (Creed [1986] 2020, 212). These ideas, in turn, were used to justify the need to control women. In addition to her other physical differences, Elphaba is born with a mouthful of sharp teeth, biting off a finger of a village woman. To Warfield (2011, 41), this insinuates the idea of *vagina dentata* related to Freudian fears of castration anxiety. Melena also evokes the notion of castration, thinking that "[i]t was a she. It was a her. [...] The twitching, unhappy bundle was not male; it was not neutered; it was a female" (*Wicked* 22). When Nanny asks Frex how the baby is "damaged", he replies that "[i]t's a girl" (Wicked 22–23) — not directly intending it as an answer to Nanny's question, but the connotation remains, and Nanny comments on it. Not only do others view Elphaba as monstrous, but her monstrosity is of an implicitly gendered kind.

While Elphaba's body is set up as monstrous by the other characters, and, as Graham (2019, 7) asserts, partially by the text itself, she is also humanised in the text. As Graham (2019, 8) argues, throughout the novel Elphaba "moves back and forward across the border between the states of abject monster and actualised subject." While Elphaba's parents seem to accept the framing of her as monstrous without question, the text complicates it by later foregrounding her subject status, granting her a considerable amount of agency and giving her a voice by means of internal focalisation, inviting the reader to assume her perspective. The reader is given multiple differing accounts of Elphaba, which enables comparing and contrasting diverging viewpoints, creating a sense of discord and polyphony within the novel. Part of Elphaba's humanisation is that the novel shows how being seen as abject or monstrous affects her self-image. When she visits her childhood home as an adult, her father Frex tells her that as a child she hated to look at herself: "You hated your skin, your sharp features, your strange eyes" (*Wicked* 339). When Elphaba asks how she learned that hate, he replies that she was "born knowing it", adding that "[i]t was a curse. You were born to curse my life" (ibid.). Elphaba does not challenge Frex's claim, but in the context of what the novel shows and implies about her childhood, it seems more likely that this is a notion that she has internalised over the course of her upbringing, as a result of her parents treating her as monstrous.

The label 'witch' is something that is first imposed on Elphaba by others behind her back to describe her unconventional appearance and her position at the margins of the community. Over the course of the novel, however, Elphaba actively assumes and internalises this

identity. Towards the end of the novel, the third-person narration increasingly refers to her as "the Witch", telling her old friend Boq that she calls herself the Wicked Witch of the West because as long "as people are going to call you a lunatic anyway, why not get the benefit of it? It liberates you from convention" (*Wicked* 357). Boq, however, is not convinced by Elphaba's assertion of her own wickedness, telling her that "Glinda used her glitter beads, and you used your exotic looks and background, but weren't you just doing the same thing, trying to maximize what you had in order to get what you wanted?" (*Wicked* 357). While Elphaba sees the liberatory potential of reclaiming the label 'witch', Boq understands the performative nature of this identity: Elphaba's assertion of her own wickedness is no more authentic than Glinda's performance of socially acceptable femininity.

Elphaba, first labelled as a witch by others, consciously and strategically assumes the title in order to mould her public image. By the reader gaining access to Elphaba's life story, the figure of the wicked witch is not only demystified but also shown to be a performative identity or label: a witch is whatever is named as such. As in the prologue of the novel, it may function as a pejorative, rendering Elphaba Other, positioning her outside culture and into monstrous, uncontrollable nature. However, Elphaba reclaims these ideas, finding that the label 'witch' grants her agency exactly by positioning her outside conventional social norms. As such, it becomes something that may be creatively re-appropriated. Similarly to this reframing of the word 'witch', the novel uses earthy, vegetal and animal metaphors in relation to Elphaba in a manner that questions the implications of these metaphors. As Elphaba's deviant and 'monstrous' body is identified with plants and nonhuman animals, she becomes symbolically associated with these concepts. However, the text seems to ask if the association with the nonhuman, similarly to the word 'witch', needs to be understood as dehumanising and pejorative, or if it may be productively reclaimed.

3.2 Earth and Plant Imagery

Elphaba's most noticeable physical difference is her green skin. While it features prominently in Maguire's *Wicked*, the green skin tone is not mentioned in Baum's 1900 novel. Instead, the green colour originates from the 1939 film, where the Witch's face is vivid technicolour green. While the exact reason why specifically the colour green was chosen for the film is not known, green skin has since become a staple in American popular culture imagery of witches, along with black clothes, conical hats, and hooked noses (Gray 2007, 169–170). As Burger

(2009, 120) observes, the Witch's green skin is a significant part of what renders her monstrous in the MGM film, physically marking her as Other.

Though this association with monstrosity is retained from the film to *Wicked*, Elphaba's green body is also connected to earth, plants, and nonhuman animals by metaphorical language at several points in the novel. While *Wicked* the novel and *Wicked* the musical are two distinct works, these earthy motifs are also present in the latter, at least on the level of set design. Discussing Elphaba's costuming in the musical, costume designer Susan Hilferty comments that she is "connected to things that are inside the earth", explaining that "the patterns and textures I wove into her dress include fossils, stalactites, or striations that you see when you crack a stone apart" (Cote 2005, 120). In the very first sentence of the novel itself, Elphaba flying above Oz is compared to "a green fleck of the land itself, flung up and sent wheeling away by the turbulent air" (*Wicked* 1). The image equates her body with earth, and the land of Oz specifically. This close yet at the same time troubled relationship between Elphaba and earth or Oz is present throughout the prologue, where Elphaba wonders if "the curse was on the land of Oz, not on her" (*Wicked* 4) and thinks of herself having drifted "like a seed [...], apparently too desiccated to ever take root" in the "punishing political climate of Oz" (ibid.). The struggles of Elphaba's life, though at this point not yet explained to the reader in detail, are expressed by the metaphor of a plant and its relationship to the soil in which it grows.

In the rest of the novel, likewise, Elphaba's body and its parts are frequently compared to earth and plant life. Baby Elphaba is compared to "a heap of cabbage leaves", her skin "green as moss", and her brown eyes "the colour of overturned earth, flecked with mica" (*Wicked* 22–24). Boq, her college friend, thinks of her legs as bamboo poles (*Wicked* 112), while Fiyero, her lover, compares her skin to "spring leaves at their tenderest" (*Wicked* 186). One longer vegetal metaphor occurs in a passage which is focalised by Glinda, Elphaba's college roommate and later her friend. Not long after the start of their unwilling cohabitation in college dorms, Glinda urges Elphaba to try on a hat from her wardrobe. The hat in question is "the kind of super-feminine thing boys in a pantomime wore when they pretended to be girls", with "orangey swags and a yellow lace net that could be draped to achieve varying degrees of disguise", Glinda thinking that "[o]n the wrong head it would look ghastly" (*Wicked* 78). Glinda, not fond of her roommate at this point in the story, expects that she will later be able to laugh at the event with her friends. However, Glinda is surprised by the result:

> But Elphaba dropped the whole sugary plate onto her strange pointed head, and looked at Galinda[1] again from underneath the broad brim. She seemed like a *rare flower*, her skin *stemlike* in its soft pearlescent sheen, the hat a *botanical riot*. (*Wicked* 78, emphases mine).

Glinda associates Elphaba's body with the stem of a flower, while the hat, "a botanical riot", is the blossom, the two together comprising the whole of a plant. The metaphor enables Glinda to see beauty in Elphaba, whom she has this far considered ugly. At the same time, it aligns Elphaba with vegetal life rather than human, metaphorically rendering her into a nonhuman being, a plant or a part of one.

A kind of subversion of this recurring image of Elphaba's body parts being compared to green plants occurs when she, after discovering Fiyero's dead body in her flat, seeks refuge in a cloister. There Elphaba is received by a mysterious old woman, Yackle. As Yackle takes Elphaba's hands in hers, Yackle's hands are described as the "sepal" around "furls of young petal" (*Wicked* 222), the outer green parts of a flower sheltering a usually different-coloured bud. Here, however, the typical colours of this image are reversed, as Yackle's not-green hands shelter Elphaba's green ones. Whereas in the earlier excerpt Glinda compares Elphaba's body to the stem, which supports and delivers nutrients to the blossom, here Elphaba's hands are the "bud" protected by the "sepal", on the receiving end of protection and nurture, though it comes from an unexpected and unconventional person, Yackle. It is also worth noting that Elphaba's skin colour is not mentioned in this passage, which I read as focalising Yackle. While the other women in the cloister focalised earlier in the scene do take notice of it, Yackle seems neither shocked nor fascinated by Elphaba's greenness.

The 1939 film is not the first instance that the colour green is connected to monstrosity or evil. In European folklore, several monsters and evil creatures have been pictured as green. Furthermore, green got associated with witches as the colour of their flying ointment (Gray 2007, 169–170). In *Wicked*, Elphaba's green skin elicits similar associations. The phrase "green as sin" in reference to Elphaba's skin tone reoccurs multiple times in the text (*Wicked* 24; 116; 245). Green, however, also has other culturally well-established meanings. Especially in the context of plant life, it is associated with ideas such as life, change, fertility and growth. Incidentally green is also the colour of the ecology movement, to the point of 'the

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[1] In *Wicked*, Glinda is originally named Galinda and eventually shortens her name over the course of her character arc. In this passage, which occurs prior to this development, she still goes by Galinda. I have chosen to use 'Glinda' in my own text so as not to confuse the reader, as the form 'Galinda' is used in the novel only for a relatively short period.

green movement' being its synonym. With issues such as deforestation and the carbon dioxide binding capacities of green plants gaining more visibility in public discourses as of late, people have perhaps become increasingly aware of the vital role green plants play in the ecosystems of the entire planet. By associating Elphaba's body with green plants, *Wicked* makes use of these connotations of the colour green, creating new, yet culturally recognisable meanings to the originally simply monstrous feature.

At the same time, the use of plant metaphors also metaphorically places Elphaba in the realm of the nonhuman rather than the human, nature rather than culture. Nanny thinks the green of her skin is "[n]ot an ugly color [...]. Just not a human color" (*Wicked* 24). Though the wording situates Elphaba outside of humanity, it simultaneously seems to ask if "not a human" needs to be understood as a denigrating qualification. In popular imagination, naturalised women or feminised natures have often been envisioned in terms of passive and subservient earth mothers (Alaimo 2000, 16; Plumwood 1994, 20) or alternatively as uncontrollable, monstrous Others (Parker 2020, 164). However, at the same time Alaimo (2000, 7) finds that strategic appropriation of the woman–earth connection may serve to upset "the very categories of male and female, culture and nature, subject and object — since the silent ground is not supposed to speak." Reclaiming the women–nature connection can function as a counter-discourse to dominant discourses, given that it entails playing nature "with a vengeance", in a manner that questions reductive cultural views of women and nature (Alaimo 2000, 136; 179; 183).

I argue that this kind of counter-discourse proposed by Alaimo is realised in *Wicked*. While Elphaba is identified with nature, plants and earth, she is depicted as a multidimensional character. Elphaba is depicted as neither completely innocent nor monstrous, her characterisation not fitting neatly into either of the established tropes of the naturalised woman. Instead, the text employs the dehumanising rhetoric around Elphaba's body in a subversive manner, in which an association with nature does not preclude agency. By the vegetal metaphors she comes to embody what Alaimo (2000, 7) describes as the "silent ground" that is "not supposed to speak" yet does so. While the vegetal metaphors are often used in ways that underscore Elphaba's surprising beauty or vulnerability, they do so in contrast to her presupposed monstrosity, adding dimensions to the character rather than flattening her. Instead of rendering Elphaba either silent or abject, being compared to vegetal life enables new perspectives to her subjectivity in the text. A similar effect is accomplished by metaphors that compare Elphaba to nonhuman animals, which I discuss in the following section.

3.3 Elphaba as Animal

In addition to the vegetal imagery discussed above, Elphaba's body and her skin colour are also connected to animal or zoomorphic metaphors. This is especially frequent in the first part of the novel, which depicts Elphaba's early childhood. To her parents, Elphaba's physical differences seem to render her in some way nonhuman, inhuman or other-than-human: as Frohreich (2009, 135) observes, the adult characters use the pronouns "she" and "it" interchangeably when discussing baby Elphaba. When searching for toddler Elphaba gone missing, they call out things such as "Little frog!", "Little snake!" and "Lizard girl!" (*Wicked* 61). Melena thinks of her daughter sitting quietly looking like a "a sphinx" or a "stone beast" and likens her jump to a "green kitten" (*Wicked* 46). When Elphaba is playing at being a dragon on all fours, the narration remarks that "[h]er green skin made her more persuasive, as if she were a dragon child" (*Wicked* 44). These comparisons with nonhuman animals and mythical beasts bear similarities to how so-called monstrous births have been described as hybrids of human and animal traits, in accordance with Elphaba's parents viewing her as uncanny and monstrous.

Though these animal metaphors become less frequent in the text as Elphaba ages, they do not entirely disappear. Glinda's college friends compare Elphaba to a grasshopper (*Wicked* 81). When she seeks refuge in a cloister after Fiyero's death, a novice opens the door for her, finding "a figure crouched like a monkey in the dark corner of the stone", blood on the "odd green wrists" of the "creature" (*Wicked* 220). This identifies Elphaba as something other-than-human, an animal or a "creature". Elphaba is associated with nonhuman animals in the text also in ways that are not directly connected to her skin colour or her body. Observing her roommate, Glinda thinks that

> Elphaba looked like something between an animal and an Animal, like something more than life but not quite Life. [...] You'd almost call it 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. (*Wicked* 77–78)

Like the novice in the scene in the cloister, Glinda finds Elphaba's presence in some way uncanny, on the border of the categories of animal and Animal. This Glinda attributes to "nature not having done its full job with Elphaba, not quite having managed to make her enough like herself" (*Wicked* 78), framing Elphaba as in some way incomplete, stuck in a liminal space between the animal and the human.

The aforementioned associations between Elphaba and nonhuman animals occur in passages in which the focaliser is someone else than Elphaba herself. At the same time, Elphaba's own sense of self also seems to be connected to a rejection of humanity. Over the course of the novel, Elphaba states multiple times her belief that she lacks a soul. In the tradition of Western thought, humans have been considered to have souls, while nonhuman animals have not. The most extreme philosophical example is perhaps the Cartesian notion of animals as purely mechanistic creatures with little to no sentience (Donovan 1993, 176; Plumwood 1994, 108). Although the secularisation of society has made it less common for philosophers to discuss the topics of consciousness and subjectivity in terms of souls, human inner lives still tend to be viewed as more substantial than those of nonhuman animals. Likewise, the matter of women's souls or interiority has been held questionable in the patriarchal philosophical tradition (Donovan 1993, 169), women's experiences frequently considered to be secondary or peripheral to those of privileged male Human subjects. As Alaimo (2000, 2) explains, women's perceived naturality or animality played a part in placing them "outside the domain of human subjectivity, rationality, and agency." As such, both women and nonhuman nature were completely or partially excluded from the realm of potential subjects.

By asserting that she has no soul, Elphaba aligns herself with the nonhuman rather than the human, and within the world of the novel, the animal rather than the Animal. It is notable that Elphaba does not necessarily question the notion of a soul as such, but specifically the notion of herself having one, stating that "I can make no comment on the souls of others" (*Wicked* 344). When discussing this matter with Fiyero, her lover, she asks what proof she has of herself having a soul. To this, Fiyero poses the question "How can you have a conscience if you don't have a soul?" (*Wicked* 199). Elphaba replies:

> How can a bird feed its young if it has no consciousness of before and after? A conscience [...] is only consciousness in another dimension, the dimension of time. What you call conscience I prefer to call instinct. Birds feed their young without understanding why, without weeping about how all that is born must die, sob sob. I do my work with a similar motivation: the movement in the gut toward food, fairness, and safety. I am a pack animal wheeling with the herd, that's all. I'm a forgettable leaf on a tree. (Wicked 199)

Here Elphaba asserts that she is no more than another organism in nature, animal or plant, navigating toward the simple goals of "food, fairness and safety" (ibid.). By this she rejects an individualistic, rational model of the subject, or at least of herself as one. From Fiyero's point of view, it is also a repudiation of personal ethical and moral responsibility, as it is the

justification Elphaba offers for her use of terrorism. However, the discussion exposes the way Elphaba does not perceive notions such as humanity or individuality as precursory for agency. The alleged embodiedness and 'mindlessness' women and nature are doomed to in patriarchal thought (Alaimo 2000, 3; Plumwood 1994, 108) are here transformed so that they do not entail a negative meaning or preclude agency or resistance. Instead, Elphaba is identifying herself with nonhuman nature "with a vengeance" (Alaimo 2000, 136), revaluing ways of existing that have long been devalued and considered outside the notion of the subject in Western thought.

While Elphaba includes the notion of "fairness" among those shared by all or most species, she tends to take a pessimistic view on the notion of humanity, stating that "I never use the words humanist or humanitarian, as it seems to me that to be human is to be capable of the most heinous crimes in nature" (*Wicked* 187). With a few notable exceptions, Elphaba's relationships to other humans tend to be fraught, her forming closer bonds with nonhuman animals instead. Already on the cover of the novel Elphaba is depicted surrounded by animals, holding a winged monkey in her arms, with a cat and a dog at her feet, as if offering them shelter from the impending tornado in the background. In the story she forms close connections with several non-anthropomorphic nonhuman animals, which often seems to be related to her magical capabilities. When toddler Elphaba goes missing, the adults eventually find her peacefully coexisting with a strange beast:

> Behind her was a low growl. There was a beast, a feiltop tiger, or some strange hybrid of tiger and dragon, with glowing orangey eyes. Elphaba was sitting in its folded forearms as if on a throne.
>
> 'Horrors,' she said again, looking without binocular vision, staring at the glass in which her parents and Nanny could make out nothing but darkness. 'Horrors.' (*Wicked* 62)

Elphaba's parents' reaction to this scene is not described, as the chapter ends simply with their discovery of Elphaba, but one suspects that this experience would render Elphaba even more uncanny than she already is in their eyes. Possibly at this point of the novel it has the same effect on the reader, as Elphaba's behaviour or the presence of the unidentified animal are never explained outright in the text, creating a sense of mystery and unease. The scene is the first clear display of Elphaba's magical abilities, which enable her to see horrors in a toy glass ball in which her parents and Nanny are unable to see anything. Like many of her other sporadic bouts of magic, it co-occurs with an interaction with a nonhuman animal — an

interaction which itself is likely facilitated by magic, as the child Elphaba and the unidentified beast are able to have a close, peaceful encounter with each other.

This ability to interact with nonhuman animals in ways that normal humans are unable to remains in Elphaba's adult age. On her way to Fiyero's castle, Kiamo Ko, Elphaba travels with a caravan of other travellers heading to Vinkus, the western part of Oz. On this journey, she encounters multiple non-anthropomorphic animals which become her companions. The cook of the company has a dog named Killyjoy, which he mistreats. Elphaba's unacknowledged son, Liir, befriends Killyjoy, while Elphaba herself develops a dislike for the cook and his casual cruelty towards Killyjoy. When travelling through a forest, Elphaba persuades a swarm of bees to come along with the company. Soon after, the cook is found dead with his body full of bee stings. Though no one in the company directly accuses Elphaba of the cook's death, the text heavily implies that she is responsible for it, having magically, and likely subconsciously, conveyed her dislike of the cook to the bees. After this Elphaba encounters Nastoya, an Elephant matriarch disguised as an elderly human woman by a glamour, that gives her three crows as witch's "familiars" (*Wicked* 238).

Later on the journey through Vinkus, Elphaba finds a baby snow monkey on an island in a small lake. At first, she is not fully able to see the animal from the distance, only discerning a "small beast in the grass. Elphie couldn't see but it looked like a baby" (*Wicked* 241). Elphaba, to whom water is deadly, rescues the monkey at great risk to herself, freezing the water of the lake as she runs to the monkey. Like her previous bouts of magic, the act is unpremeditated and instinctive. Before being identified as a snow monkey, the creature is merely referred to in the text as a "baby" in a manner that is usually reserved for human babies, leaving its species up to question. This mirrors the way Elphaba is zoomorphised in the text on previous occasions, perhaps in particular the young novice's description of her as "a figure crouched like a monkey" (*Wicked* 220). Here the lack of qualification bridges the species difference between Elphaba and the baby monkey, rendering it irrelevant or at least reducing its importance. The monkey, named Chistery, becomes Elphaba's companion, her showing him more affection than her unrecognised son, Liir. At the same time, the care between Elphaba and Chistery coexists with violence, as he is one of the monkeys she mutilates by attaching wings on them, which I discuss further in section 5.3.

In addition to the perhaps more obvious point of the figure of the witch embodying the cultural fear of uncontrollable women, Parker (2020, 164) sees the witch as an example of

"embodied ecophobia." According to Parker, the witch, along with other kinds of monstrous figures, exists in the boundary between human and nonhuman, as witches in myth and popular culture are almost always connected to unruly nature (ibid.). In particular the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (in Baum's novel and the 1939 film) is defined by her connections to nonhuman animals. In the novel, the Witch's powers largely depend on her being able to command groups of animals, as she has a pack of wolves, a murder of crows, a swarm of bees and a flock of winged monkeys to do her bidding.

All these nonhuman animals appear also in *Wicked*, though the wolf has been changed for the more domesticated dog. Whereas in Baum's novel these animals merely function as obstacles for Dorothy to overcome, in *Wicked* their relationships to Elphaba are portrayed as meaningful as the reader gains access to their shared histories. This applies especially to Elphaba's relationships with the two named animals, Chistery and Killyjoy, while her interactions with the bees and the crows are not described to similar extent. Similarly, the deaths of Killyjoy, the crows and the bees at the hands of Dorothy's friends are framed as tragic rather than triumphant moments. Furthermore, the violence Dorothy's friends inflict on Elphaba's animal companions escalates the conflict between the two parties. Though Elphaba originally intends for a more diplomatic and even friendly approach with Dorothy, especially Killyjoy's death makes her hostile towards Dorothy and her companions.

Although Elphaba's animals are not internally focalised, the reader may get a sense of them as experiencing subjects from the ways their emotions, reactions and activities are described. Even this is a marked departure from Baum's text, in which the animal function as mere biological weapons. The role given to nonhuman animals in fairytale fiction is often that of a sidekick, pet or familiar, and in many respects the dynamic between Elphaba and her animal companions in *Wicked* echoes these well-established tropes. Ferrier-Watson (2017, 229) goes as far to describe the relationships between Elphaba and her nonhuman animal companions in terms of Elphaba mind-controlling the animals with magic. However, I do not find this reading necessitated by the text, as the relationships between Elphaba and her animals seem more reciprocal, depicted less in terms of her simply mind-controlling the animals, and more in terms of her being able to communicate with them, even though not all this communication occurs on a verbal or even conscious level.

An example of this non-verbal and subconscious communication might be the bees killing the cook, which I read as not fully intentional on Elphaba's part, but the bees realising Elphaba's

wish for the cook to die. Later, Princess Nastoya remarks to Elphaba that "*Something* told those bees to kill the cook" (*Wicked* 239), confirming Elphaba's responsibility in the matter. However, Nastoya's verb choice is 'told', not 'made', which leaves at least some agency to the bees. In fact, the extent to which Elphaba herself is in control of her own capabilities is questionable, and Elphaba killing the cook seems more like an unconscious and indeliberate act than a fully deliberated murder. Furthermore, near the end of the novel Elphaba tells the bees that "we need a little sting — not me, you fools" (*Wicked* 392). Elphaba means to tell the bees to go sting Dorothy and her friends who are approaching the castle, but the bees would appear to misunderstand that Elphaba wants herself to be stung. While the bees are obviously influenced by Elphaba's magic, it does not necessarily render them into mere passive puppets under her control, as there is negotiation and shared agency involved. Rather than merely instrumental, the relationships between Elphaba and her animal companions are intersubjective and dialogical.

What further complicates the dynamic between Elphaba and her animal companions is the way the qualities of animal companions 'bleed' into Elphaba in the text. Whereas previously Elphaba has been compared to any, especially green-coloured, nonhuman animals, once she gains her animal companions, the zoomorphic metaphors begin to concern the similitude between her and her familiars, especially her flying animal companions. On multiple occasions Elphaba's movements are likened to those of her crows. When skating with Sarima's family, she "looked like one of her crows: knees out, elbows flailing, rags flapping, gloved hands raking for balance" (*Wicked* 271). When agitated, she is described as "twitching as if with a nervous disorder; her elbows flapped, as if she were a crow herself" (*Wicked* 391). What further connects her to her flying companions is that she eventually learns to fly on a broomstick. Parker (2020, 165) argues that fairy tale witches being capable of flight connects them to the nonhuman realm. Likewise, Elphaba's flight is compared to that of the winged monkeys (*Wicked* 1). The repeated comparison to the crows also identifies her with a flying animal. If Elphaba exerts magical influence over her animal companions in the story, they have influence on her on a textual level as her body is identified with them.

Like the Wicked Witch in *Oz*, Elphaba's power is in many ways conjoined to her affiliations with nonhuman animals. In the versions of *The Wizard of Oz* these affiliations mostly serve to dehumanise the Witch, making her inhuman by association. While Elphaba is zoomorphised by metaphorical language in the text, these metaphors do not negate her agency or render her inferior, same as with the vegetal and earthy metaphors discussed in section 3.1. Furthermore,

as Elphaba's relationships to her animal companions are given substance in the text, the animals are transformed from mere biological weapons they are in Baum's novel into experiencing subjects with their own histories, though they still remain supporting characters in the narrative.

3.4 Contesting the Mythical Witch

Elphaba is not the only witch in *Wicked*. Instead, there are several witch-like figures in the novel, such as Madame Morrible, Yackle and Nastoya. All these women are mysterious figures with varying degrees of moral ambiguity. All of them are also connected to nature and nonhuman animals in different ways: Madame Morrible is frequently compared to a carp fish, Yackle's name associates her with jackals, and Nastoya is an anthropomorphic Elephant disguised as a human by magic. Their embodiment and appearance are described in monstrous and uncanny terms. However, while in Madame Morrible's case her monstrous physicality seems to enhance her villainy, with Yackle and Nastoya the connection between physical monstrosity and villainy is at least partially subverted, as they are to some extent helpful figures and mentors to Elphaba.

The mythology of Oz also contains powerful magical female figures, fairy queen Lurline and her evil counterpart, The Kumbric Witch or Kumbricia. While Lurline exists in Baum's *Oz* novels as Lurlina, the Kumbric Witch is Maguire's original addition to the Ozian mythology. The name "Kumbric Witch" would seem to be a play on the "Krumbic Witch" that appears in Baum's *Glinda of Oz* (1920, 103), but the role the Kumbric Witch occupies in *Wicked* has no direct equivalent in Baum's works. In *Wicked*, the Kumbric Witch gives name to a pass that marks the entrance to the western part of Oz, Kumbricia's pass. On Elphaba's westward journey the company travels through the pass, which makes the discussion turn to the mythological Kumbricia, the tales of which "abound" in Oz (*Wicked* 231). In the Ozian culture and collective subconscious, the Kumbric Witch occupies the place of the archetypal wicked witch: an old man travelling with the company goes as far to state that "[e]very other witch is just a shadow, a daughter, a sister, a decadent descendant; the Kumbric Witch is the model further back than which it seems impossible to go" (ibid.). The Kumbric Witch, then, seems to be kind of an ur-witch, similarly to how in the American collective consciousness the Wicked Witch of the West arguably embodies the prototypical, archetypal witch.

In the Oziad, the foundational epic and creation myth of Oz, the Kumbric Witch is depicted as a terrifying force of nature. During Elphaba and Glinda's audience with him, the Wizard of Oz quotes an excerpt from the Oziad:

> *Then hobbling like a glacier, old Kumbricia*
> *Rubs the naked sky till it rains with blood.*
> *She tears the skin off the sun and eats it hot.*
> *She tucks the sickle moon in her patient purse.*
> *She bears it out, a full-grown changeling stone.*
> *Shard by shard she rearranges the world.*
> *It looks the same, she says, but it is not.*
> *It looks as they expect, but it is not.* (Wicked 176; italics in the original)

In this passage, the Kumbric Witch is depicted as powerful, monstrous, and bodily connected to forces of nature, "hobbling like a glacier", rubbing the sky and eating the skin off the sun. She is also affiliated with imagery of pregnancy and birth, the cycle of the moon functioning as a metaphor for pregnancy. The Kumbric Witch's power is both destructive and creative, rearranging the world "shard by shard" (*Wicked* 176). Moreover, the description of the geography of the Kumbricia's pass likens the landscape to a female body, as it is described looking like "a woman lying on her back, her legs spread apart, welcoming them", imbued with "unsettling eroticism" (*Wicked* 230). The Kumbric Witch, then, comes to represent a monstrous and ungovernable female nature, at the same time embodied and agentive.

At university, Elphaba assists her Goat professor Dr. Dillamond in his research on the biological differences between animals, Animals and humans. This research project also has political implications, as the civil rights of Animals are being stripped off. This has Elphaba tracing the genealogy of Ozian ideas of human–Animal–animal relations. As the libraries of men's colleges are restricted from women and Animals, Elphaba's male human friend Boq aids her in collecting information on the topic. On one of his excavations to his university library, Boq finds a manuscript scroll containing what might be a picture of the Kumbric Witch:

> The Witch stood on an isthmus connecting two rocky lands, and on either side of her stretched patches of cerulean blue sea, with white-lipped waves of astonishing vigor and particularity. The Witch held in her hands a beast of unrecognizable species, though it was clearly drowned, or nearly drowned. She cradled it in an arm that, without attention to actual skeletal flexibility, lovingly encircled the beast's wet, spiky-furred back. With her other hand she was freeing a breast from her robe, offering suck to the creature. Her expression was hard to read, or had the monk's hand smudged, or age and grime bestowed a sfumato sympathy? She was

> nearly motherly, with miserable child. Her look was inward, or sad, or something. (Wicked 125–124)

While Boq reads the figure's expression as maternal and protective, he finds the position of her feet incongruous with her face as "the feet were turned out at ninety-degree angles to the shins. They showed in profile as mirror images, heels clicked together and toes pointing in opposite directions, like a stance in ballet", as the figure stands "on the narrow strand with prehensile grip, apparent even through the silver-colored shoes" (*Wicked* 125). Boq experiences a similar discord as he questions what the figure in the picture is doing, wondering if the Witch "wasn't feeding the drenched animal, but killing it? Sacrificing it to stay the floods?" (ibid.) but at the same time feels that the picture "doesn't look like a portrait of determination [...]. It looks reactive rather than proactive". Boq finds the figure in the picture "at the very least confused" (*Wicked* 126). The picture becomes the nexus of multiple diverging meanings as it lends itself to contradictory interpretations and associations, such as nurture, violence, resolution and insecurity.

In the novel there are outlined several different versions of a creation myth of Animals, all of which involve the motifs of a flood and a mythical figure interfering with the course of the events. The Kumbric Witch also appears in some of these myths, as some versions imply that distinction between Animals and animals was caused by a Kumbric Witch spell (*Wicked* 115). Thinking about these mythological accounts in relation to the image in the scroll, Boq speculates the scroll conveys an amalgamation of these myths: "[P]erhaps this document supported the fable of a Kumbric Witch spell that gave the Animals the gifts of speech, memory, and remorse. Perhaps it merely refuted it, but glowingly" (*Wicked* 125). In these passages the text underlines on one hand the enduring quality, on the other the dynamism and mutability of mythology. The literary mythology of Oziad coexists with enduring diverging folkloric accounts.

Boq, Elphaba, and other characters interpret these myths, examine them as historically transmitted mythology, and propose theories of their evolution over time. The manuscript scroll Boq discovers is an example of forgotten, marginalised mythology. Boq deduces that "by the jeweled tones of the work that the document hadn't been opened in centuries" (*Wicked* 125). He fails to identify the species of the animal on the figure's arms, cannot read the text accompanying the picture, and is puzzled by the figure's expression, finding it "hard to read", suspecting that the picture might have been smudged or corroded by age. The picture suggests an alternative to established mythology, but its meaning in its original context is lost

in time, inaccessible while only interpretations and re-interpretations of its equivocal and seemingly contradictory elements remain.

These contesting viewpoints to the Kumbric Witch within the textual world of the novel bear similarities on how the text itself engages in the reinterpretation and rereading of the emblematic popular culture figure of the Wicked Witch of the West. When Elphaba asks what prevents the picture from being the Fairy Queen Lurline, who also appears in similar myths, Boq feels that “the accoutrements of glamour are missing. I mean the golden nimbus of hair. The elegance. The transparent wings. The wand” (*Wicked* 126). As Kumbric Witch and Lurline inhabit similar roles in mythology, the difference between good and evil is differentiated simply by appearances, suggesting that the polarised dichotomy between good and evil women in Ozian mythology is indeed illusionary, a matter of framing. I would read this as commentary on the behalf of the text on the similar appearance-based dichotomies of good and evil witches in Baum’s works and the 1939 film, in which the readers or viewers instantly recognise Glinda as the good witch from her fairy-like appearance, while the Wicked Witch’s monstrous physicality inevitably marks her as wicked.

Within *Wicked* the novel itself, Kumbricia shares several parallels with Elphaba and is identified with her at multiple points in the novel. When the caravan she travels with crosses through Kumbricia’s pass, the members of the company feel that the Kumbric Witch is watching them and preparing to attack them — thus Elphaba, who eventually kills the cook, becomes an obvious candidate for a Kumbric Witch. Furthermore, the stories of the Kumbric Witch are behind Elphaba’s moniker as a Witch, which begins during her stay in Kiamo Ko with Fiyero’s widow, Sarima and her remaining family. Sarima’s sisters start the habit of calling her “Auntie Witch” behind her back, “echoing the old legends of Kumbricia, which were viler – and more persistent – in the Kells than elsewhere in Oz” (*Wicked* 250). Like Elphaba, the Kumbric Witch is connected to natural and animal imagery. In the excerpt from the Oziad, she is described akin to a destructive and creative force of nature, while in the picture discovered by Boq she is depicted holding an animal. The nearly drowned beast on the arms of the witch echoes the baby snow monkey Chistery, whom Elphaba saves from drowning later in the novel. The picture Boq finds shares also marked similarities to Elphaba on the cover of the novel, where she is holding Chistery in a similar position.

In the same picture, the combination of shoes, the gown of a “hazy blue” colour and the unidentified animal on the arms of the Witch bears similarity to Dorothy’s recognisable

ensemble in *The Wizard of Oz*, both Baum's novel and the 1939 film, with her silver shoes (ruby slippers in the film), her blue-and-white gingham dress and her dog Toto. Later in the novel, after meeting Dorothy, Boq directly compares her to the picture he remembers from his youth, finding resemblance between Dorothy with her dog Toto and the witch with the unidentified animal in the picture (*Wicked* 360). At the same time, the text explicitly states the parallels between Elphaba and Dorothy. Near the end of her shortened life, Elphaba comes to understand the similarities between her younger self and Dorothy: "I see myself there: the girl witness, wide-eyed as Dorothy. Staring at a world too horrible to comprehend" (*Wicked* 383). The Kumbric Witch in the picture, then, is identified as both Elphaba and Dorothy, one more thing that ties them together. At the same time the picture also involves the very thing that separates Elphaba and Dorothy, as the shoes are the root of the conflict between them. Elphaba sees the shoes as a physical emblem of her father's love and acceptance, a key for emotional closure. As Elphaba fails to attain the shoes and the emotional closure they represent to her, in some sense her transformation into the Kumbric Witch remains incomplete.

Elphaba and Dorothy are not the only characters connected to the Kumbric Witch in the novel. The others are Jackle and Madame Morrible, whom Elphaba at one point suspects to be the same person and the Kumbric Witch, acting as an *eminence grise* behind the Wizard's regime. Even though Elphaba's conjunction is likely a result of paranoia, unsupported by the rest of the text, I find that the comparison to the Kumbric Witch is meaningful on a thematic level. While Jackle, an old woman haunting the margins of Elphaba's life, remains a mysterious and ambiguous character to the end of the novel, Madame Morrible can more easily be described as unethical or even plain evil. As the headmistress of the girls' college Elphaba attends, she works for the Wizard's regime and spreads propaganda against the rights of Animals. As she also is an older woman who wields magical powers, she seems to be the closest thing the novel has to a genuinely wicked witch.

By building parallels and connections between these different female characters and the mythical figure of the Kumbric Witch, the text suggests that each of these women contains the potential of inhabiting the role of the archetypal wicked witch, questioning the dichotomous roles that traditional fairytale female characters are restricted to. By emphasizing the interpretative and contingent aspects of mythology, the text further complicates these dynamics, suggesting that the trope of a wicked witch might be largely a matter of framing. The idea of a witch is shown to be at the same time artificial and constructed yet containing

potential for creative reimagining. Furthermore, as the Kumbric Witch embodies a monstrous, unruly nature, she becomes part of the novel's re-appropriation of the woman–nature connection elsewhere exemplified by the use of zoomorphic and vegetal imagery in relation to Elphaba's body. Even as Elphaba comes to embody nature, that nature is depicted as powerful, agentive and not always harmless, capable of resisting the patriarchal and anthropocentric power structures of Oz.

4 Anthropomorphism, Animals and Women

In the previous chapter I have analysed how vegetal and zoomorphic metaphors are connected to Elphaba in the text, rendering her part animal or plant on metaphorical level. In this chapter my intent is to read the anthropomorphism in *Wicked* in ways that connect to the main themes of my thesis. In the following section 4.1 I discuss the ways in which the oppression of Animals in *Wicked* is similar to the historical oppression of women. Furthermore, in section 4.2 I discuss how human-centric society marginalises the bodies of animals, rendering them effectively disabled, which I further connect to the novel's depiction of Elphaba's non-normative embodiment. These are not meant to be definitive readings of the meaning of Animals, but rather two of many possible readings. To conclude, in section 4.3 I discuss the notions of language and silence in relation to Elphaba, Animals and animals.

4.1 Anthropomorphism and the Human/Nonhuman Boundary

The understanding of the idea of humanity has been historically contingent. The hierarchical division between humans and non-human animals was influentially outlined by philosophers such as Aristotle and Descartes. This division has been imagined in what Plumwood (1994, 49) terms as hyperseparation or radical exclusion, a hierarchy which does not allow for continuity or similitude. While the concept of the human has been constructed against the concept of the animal, not all humans have been granted the recognition as fully human. Comparison to nonhuman animals is a common strategy of Othering human individuals and groups, as women, colonised peoples and disabled people have been animalized at various points in history (Plumwood 1994, 29; Braidotti 2017, 23).

Feminist critiques of the Western humanist ideal of 'Man' have pointed out that the 'Man' in question is, indeed, very much male (Braidotti 2017, 23). The exclusion of women and animals from the full subject status has been linked together at least since Aristotle, both having been construed as subordinate Others in masculinist tradition of thought (Donovan 1993, 169). This does not mean that the positions of women and nonhuman animals are identical, nor are either of these categories to be viewed as a homogenous whole, denying the substantial differences among both women and animals. As Birke & Holmberg (2018, 125) remark, categories such as "[s]pecies, race and gender are relational rather than analogous." However, the ideologies and mechanisms behind the subordination of women and animals have historically functioned in similar, mutually reinforcing ways.

In *Wicked*, the human/animal division is already troubled by the presence of anthropomorphic Animals. The distinction between animals and Animals in *Wicked* is based on the use of anthropomorphism Baum's *Oz* books, in which some animals possess anthropomorphic qualities and capacities such as human speech, while some do not. However, unlike in Maguire's novel, in Baum's novels these varying degrees of anthropomorphism are not explicitly articulated to the reader. While this kind of selective use of anthropomorphism is not uncommon in children's literature, the shift of genre from children's fiction to adult fantasy in *Wicked* tends to demand for more consistent and systematic worldbuilding. At the same time, this distinction between anthropomorphic Animals and non-anthropomorphic animals does not remain a mere worldbuilding detail or a background element in the novel. Instead, it is central to the narrative, as the oppression of Animals motivates Elphaba to turn against the Wizard's regime, and her choices to become a fugitive and a terrorist.

The anthropomorphism in *Wicked* is also relevant to the way the novel interrogates the construction of the categories human and animal. In Baum's *Oz* novels, the distinction between non-anthropomorphic animals and anthropomorphic Animals is only implicit, whereas in *Wicked* it is spelled out explicitly. The very same distinction, however, is at the same time questioned by both the characters and the narrative. Simons (2001, 118–120) proposes a continuum of what he terms as trivial and strong forms of anthropomorphism in literature. Whereas the trivial anthropomorphism in this categorisation is merely depicting animal characters with human attributes and habits, strong anthropomorphism in some way challenges, troubles or interrogates the division between the human and the nonhuman (Simons 2001, 118–120; Lammi 2023). In terms of this continuum, I would place the anthropomorphism in *Wicked* on the strong end of the scale, whereas the anthropomorphism in Baum's Oz might be closer to what Simons considers as trivial. The shift of genre and target audience allows *Wicked* to take seriously the potential implications of the selective anthropomorphism present in Baum's *Oz* novels and examine how the presence of anthropomorphic animals complicates the ways the characters understand the categories human and nonhuman.

In the beginning of the novel, at the time of Elphaba's birth, Oz is a monarchy ruled by the matrilineal Ozma dynasty. At some point during the time skip between Elphaba's early childhood and her entering college, a man titling himself as the Wizard usurps the throne, effectively becoming a dictator in Oz. During his reign, the Wizard launches campaigns that disadvantage various marginalised populations of Oz. The Wizard's troops mine rubies in a

peripheral region of Oz at the expense of the indigenous population and the local ecosystems. Meanwhile, the government begins to advance legislation that strips away the civil rights of anthropomorphic Animals. While it seems likely that Animals might have faced economic and social marginalisation already under the Ozma dynasty, the Wizard enforces restrictions to the physical and social mobility of Animals, encoding their marginalisation into law. This repression advances in stages. First Animals are banned from using certain services and holding public offices. Eventually they are forced into either exile or slavery on farms, where they are treated much like the animals in the agriculture industry are in the real world.

Several possible motivations for these policies are proposed in the text. Elphaba explains them as striving to force Animals to become cheap labour for the struggling agriculture industry suffering from drought (*Wicked* 135). Interestingly and perhaps in a somewhat different vein, a Cow with whom Elphaba talks later in the novel suggests that the rise of mechanical clockwork labour known as tiktok machinery has changed the position of Animals for worse (*Wicked* 317). It seems that pre-Wizard's regime, there were significant regional differences in the position of Animals; in Munchkinland, Animals appear to have been "well established" as "trusted workers" (ibid.), reduced to slave labour over the course of the story. In contrast, in the peripheral Vinkus there seem to be little to no Animals. Their situation appears to be the worst in the imperial core of Oz, consisting of the privileged and rich area of Gillikin and the Emerald City, the central metropolis.

In scholarship on *Wicked*, the oppression of anthropomorphic Animals in the novel is frequently read as an allegory, perhaps taking the common strategy of metaphorically Othering human populations to a literal level. Burger (2009, 117–118), for instance, notes the parallels to the persecution of Jewish people in Nazi Germany, while elaborating that like Elphaba's greenness, the oppression of Animals can be understood as an unfixed metaphor or allegory for Otherness. At the same time, I find that it is not irrelevant that the vehicle of this allegory is specifically anthropomorphic nonhuman animals. Rather, it ties into the wider themes of humanity and non-humanity in the novel, and, in my reading, is central to the novel's interrogation of these categories. As the group being marginalised in the world of the novel is anthropomorphic nonhuman Animals, the Othering-by-animalisation faced by marginalised groups becomes explicit in the text, as well as the possible problems with some strategies for resisting this marginalisation.

4.2 Animal Labour and Feminised Labour

Elphaba enters college in Shiz, a large university town in the prosperous northern part of Oz. In Shiz, schooling is segregated by sex, boys' colleges generally being more prestigious and esteemed than girls' ones. It is mentioned that whereas boys' colleges employ human men as professors, the faculties of girls' colleges consist mostly of women and anthropomorphic Animals. This is one of the instances in which the novel parallels the oppressions of Animals and women. Both groups have only limited access to public and intellectual spheres, having to settle for less prestigious colleges, if they attend college at all.

As the Wizard's government imposes restrictions on Animals' access to public services, including working in public professions, such as universities, Animals are "to be herded back to the farmlands and wilds if they wanted to work for wages at all" (*Wicked* 89). The state pushing Animals back to their 'designated' place in the farming industry seems like a backlash against the increase in Animals in academic and intellectual spaces and possibly in the society as a whole. As Burger (2009, 146) observes, the banns imposed by the Wizard's regime effectively force Animals entirely out of the public sphere. Explaining these developments to his human students, Dr. Dillamond points out the lack of Animal students in Shiz. His own grandmothers were "milking-Goats at a farm in Gillikin" who were able to afford him a college education with their hard-earned savings (*Wicked* 89). As the Wizard keeps imposing new restrictions, Dr. Dillamond suspects that the efforts of his grandmothers "are about to go to waste" (ibid.). According to Elphaba, Animals are "recalled to the lands of their ancestors, a ploy to give the farmers a sense of control over something anyway" (*Wicked* 135).

Here I see parallels to historical and contemporary backlashes against women's emancipation and increasing freedom. Even before the escalation of anti-Animal policies, the access of Animals and women to educational spaces and information is limited: the extensive libraries of men's colleges are restricted from women and animals both. Neither Dr. Dillamond, being a goat, nor Elphaba, being a woman, are allowed to access a boy's college library that might hold valuable resources for their research project. To access these resources Elphaba has to ask for help from Boq, a human male friend attending the college. In the real world, similar barriers to access to academic and intellectual spaces and writing have historically been imposed on women. Elphaba herself acknowledges the similarities between the oppressions of Animals and women, stating that "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" (*Wicked* 111).

At a point in the novel where the repression and marginalisation of Animals has escalated into full-fledged slavery and genocide, Elphaba has a discussion with an enslaved Cow. The unnamed Cow tells Elphaba about how female Animals are exploited for their reproductive labour in the farming industry, recounting her own experiences of rape, forced pregnancies, and having her babies taken from her and killed. Of course, this is also the way female nonhuman animals are treated in the farming industry of our world. However, the anthropomorphic Animals in Oz are able to contextualise and analyse their situation in a manner typical to humans, with an understanding of the political forces at play: as the Cow grimly states, "Animals in pens have lots of time to develop theories" (*Wicked* 317).

Ecofeminists have written at length about the interconnections between the exploitation of animals and the exploitation of human women's reproductive labour. Gruen (1993, 63), for instance, pays attention to the fact that the shift from hunter-gatherer communities to agriculture was likely the outset of both the patriarchal social order and the systematic utilisation of the bodies of domesticated animals. This change, Gruen asserts, "permitted the conceptualization of animals as sluggish meat-making machines and reluctant laborers, and women as breeders of children" (ibid.), as agricultural societies depended on men's control of women's reproductive capacities. Plumwood (1994, 21) names the mechanisms that apply to the domination of both women and nonhuman nature as instrumentalism and backgrounding. Instrumentalism consists of a refusal to recognise the subordinated Other as having needs or ends of its own, only seeing it as a mere resource (Plumwood 1994, 53; 194). Backgrounding, as formulated by Plumwood (1994, 21) refers to the ways the "whole sphere of reproduction and subsistence" is rendered invisible, "providing the background to a dominant, foreground sphere of recognised achievement or causation." To Plumwood, the term can be applied to a wide variety of diverse phenomena such as manual labour, domestic labour, reproductive labour and earth's ecological processes. In what Plumwood (1994, 58) terms backgrounding, these phenomena are simultaneously "relied upon but denied or ignored", as the dominant Western male subject imagines itself self-sufficient all the while it depends on these processes.

Though her position is not comparable to that of Animals, Elphaba is also marginalised within the Ozian patriarchy. Because of her physical difference, Elphaba seems to be largely

considered unfit to occupy the feminine roles of a lover or a mother, though she eventually becomes both these things, albeit in an unconventional manner. In the eyes of the general public, however, the only socially accepted feminine role available to Elphaba seems to be that of an unpaid domestic labourer. From an early age, Elphaba has been relegated by her father Frex into a position in which her sole *raison d'être* is to take care of her physically disabled sister, Nessarose. In college, Elphaba is already largely resigned to the idea that the only possible future for her is the thankless task of being Nessarose's primary caregiver. This outlook of her future likely partly enables her to leave her studies and family behind. Even when Elphaba visits her family after years of no contact, Frex still assumes that Elphaba has come back to care for Nessarose. Elphaba feels frustrated that after all these years she's still expected to exist solely for "dear needy Nessarose" (*Wicked* 310), and Frex in turn is baffled that she declines this position. Frex reveals that he thinks that Nessarose "calmed [Elphaba] down" as a child: according to Frex, she was "a fiendish little thing", Nessarose tempering her "cruelty" (ibid.). To Frex, Elphaba is either aberrant and obdurate or Nessarose's selfless caretaker with no needs or desires of her own.

Unlike many exploited Animals, however, Elphaba is able to refuse the role as a silent domestic labourer and become a fugitive and a witch. This is reinforced by her repurposing the broom, traditionally used for feminised domestic labour, for flight. Told by Jackle that the broom would serve as a link to her destiny, Elphaba dryly comments that "I assume she meant that my destiny was domestic" (*Wicked* 271). However, Elphaba eventually utilises the broom for flight. Instead of tying her to the domestic sphere, the broom allows her to exit it, enabling her a considerable range of movement and action. Though Elphaba's agency may otherwise be limited in the narrative as she struggles against a system that is in many ways beyond her reach, on an individual level she is able to depart from her designated feminine role.

4.3 Marginalised Bodies and Disability

The bodies of Animals and Elphaba are both outside the norms of the Ozian society, which significantly contributes to their respective marginalised positions. Here I see the possibility to make connections between feminism, ecology and disability. Garland-Thomson (2008) has outlined the points of convergence between feminist theory and disability studies. Meanwhile, disability studies' relationship to some other fields such as animal studies has been more fraught (Lundblad 2020, 771). In an influential attempt to find a mutual ground between these disciplines, Taylor (2017) has argued that anthropocentrism and ableism function in a

mutually reinforcing manner. Furthermore, in a recent article Jacobs (2023) explores the possibilities of overlap between ecofeminist theory and the field of disability studies. A central concept to these intersections with disability studies is the social model of disability, which understands the category of disability as relational to the physical and cultural structuring of the society (Jacobs 2023, 303). While bodily differences are physical and material conditions, the category of disability is socially constructed as the society is structured in a way that prioritises certain bodies and abilities and marginalises or excludes others. As Garland-Thomson (2008, 17) explains, disability, like being a woman, is not "a natural state of corporeal inferiority" but a "culturally fabricated narrative of the body." This narrative functions to legitimise the unequal distribution of resources and power, disadvantaging and devaluing bodies that differ from the cultural norm, termed by Garland-Thomson (2008, 23) as the 'normate'.

Working with this understanding of disability as a societal phenomenon that is interconnected to power, the condition of Animals in *Wicked* is in a sense comparable to disability. Animals are *de facto* disabled in the Ozian society that is constructed with the human body as the norm. The human-centric arrangement of society impedes their access to the public sphere and keeps them in a marginalised and subordinate position in society. For instance, Dr. Dillamond, Elphaba's college professor in Shiz, requires a scribe to be able to do academic work, as he lacks human-like hands to hold a pen with. Dr. Dillamond also faces inconvenience in performing other everyday tasks in a society structured for humans: on the train to Shiz he asks Galinda to hand his ticket to the conductor, as the act requires opposable thumbs (*Wicked* 65).

Already before the Wizard began to impose legislation banning their presence in public life, Dr. Dillamond explains, most Animals were effectively banned from higher education and with it, places of prominence in society (*Wicked* 89), as the very physical architecture of Oz marginalises them by privileging (abled) human bodies. Furthermore, the marginalisation of Animals on the basis of their bodily alterity seems also to narrow the scope of what is considered an acceptable human body, as Fiyero encounters a Munchkinlander who mentions that many of his fellow Munchkinlanders are now considered easy targets for violent attacks in public because of their short height. Under the Wizard's reign, it seems, the body deserving of rights and respect must fit certain norms in terms of appearance and ability. As such, Elphaba's solidarity with animals gains a personal dimension, as her own green, ambiguously gendered, water-intolerant body is also in many ways deviant of societal norms.

As I have already discussed above, people's reactions to Elphaba's birth and the speculation around her abnormal physicality bear significant parallels to how the births of disabled children or so-called monstrous births have been understood over the course of European history. While Nessarose, Elphaba's younger sister, has a very visible disability, Elphaba's intolerance to water is also to an extent physically disabling, though in a manner that is not always obvious to others around her. In Baum's novel and the 1939 film the Witch's intolerance to water is only present at the moment of her death, when Dorothy accidentally kills her by splashing a bucket of water on her, though in Baum's novel it is also foreshadowed by the Witch's habit of carrying an umbrella with her. In *Wicked*, however, Elphaba's water intolerance is present throughout her life. Though a fictional fantasy disability that has no direct equivalent in real life, it still may correspond to the experiences of people with several different kinds of disabilities, as it causes Elphaba difficulty in the way she interacts with the physical world and the social reality around her.

While the novel never fully explains how Elphaba manages to live with no physical contact with water, or, for instance, if this intolerance also affects her dietary habits, it is apparent that she has to take measures to navigate with it. In a scene that takes place during Elphaba's college years, her friend Boq notes how Elphaba dresses for rainy weather:

> Elphaba showed up, during these misty weeks, entirely swathed in a brown cloak with a hood and veil that hid all but her eyes. She wore long, frayed gray gloves that she boasted buying secondhand from a local undertaker, cheap for having been used in funeral services. She sheathed her bamboo-pole legs in a double thickness of cotton stocking. (*Wicked* 112)

In the next paragraph Boq notices how Elphaba, when taking off her wet cloak, folds it "inside out so that the wet wool never touched her" (ibid.) and mentions that when "another care patron would come through, shaking water off an umbrella, Elphaba always recoiled, flinching if she was caught by even a scattering of drops" (*Wicked* 113). Elphaba does not explain these behaviours to Boq, and he seems to be unsure as to what to make of them. Later in the novel, Fiyero notes that instead of bathing in water, Elphaba uses oil to take care of her personal hygiene (*Wicked* 204). During her years in a cloister, she has to wash "terra-cotta floors without dipping her hands in the bucket—it took hours to do a single room" (*Wicked* 227). The text does not reveal if her superiors in the cloister were aware of Elphaba's intolerance towards water; in any case, they do not seem to accommodate for it.

Elphaba's water intolerance also manifests in a way that can be read as her body turning against itself. Though physically able to cry, Elphaba has to avoid crying, as the sensation of tears is physically painful to her. Elphaba resisting the impulse to cry is mentioned at multiple points in the novel. In the aftermath of Dr. Dillamond's murder, Elphaba, though closest to Dr. Dillamond in the company, holds back tears, while the others cry. Later, when Elphaba says goodbye to Glinda, leaving college and becoming a political fugitive, Glinda thinks that Elphaba turns away "not to hide her tears but to soften the fact of their absence" (*Wicked* 178). Though Glinda may interpret this as emotional stoicism on Elphaba's part, it is just as likely that Elphaba simply wants to avoid the physical pain of tears. The intolerance to water affects Elphaba's emotional expression and how others read her emotions, as from their point of view she appears to lack the normative emotional response of crying in tragic or shocking situations.

I find that these connections relate to how according to Taylor (2017, 58–59) some human bodies, including disabled bodies, have been thought as closer to nonhuman animals and by implication worth less than those within the limits of what is constituted as the normate human body. Furthermore, Garland-Thomson (2008, 22) suggests that it is perhaps because of their association to bodies and matter that has motivated the cultural need to repress and abject disabled bodies, as well as women's bodies. According to Garland-Thomson (2008, 17; 34), the disability system functions to exclude bodies which threaten phallic fantasies of bodily invulnerability and self-sufficiency. Alaimo (2008, 250), likewise, understands disability as evidence of the unpredictability and materiality of the body, something that both human and nonhuman animals have in common. According to Alaimo (ibid.), "the very obdurateness of the disabled body itself insists upon a recognition of corporeal agency", a notion which, Alaimo concludes, applies to all bodies.

In *Wicked*, the clash between their bodies and the norms of the social and physical environment is something that connects both Elphaba and Animals. The physical architecture of the Ozian society marginalises bodies such as Dr. Dillamond's. In media featuring what Simons (2001) considers trivial anthropomorphism, such issues are often ignored: either anthropomorphic animal characters can navigate a human-like society without problem, or they show no interest in activities that are restricted to certain forms of embodiment, such as writing. The choice to not anthropomorphise any physical aspects of Animals in *Wicked* exposes the fact that the society in which they live is structured ableist and anthropocentric norms. The expansion of the role of Witch's water intolerance from a singular plot point in

The Wizard of Oz to a life-long embodied experience in *Wicked* functions in the same direction, exposing how different bodies may interact with their cultural and physical environment in markedly different ways.

4.4 Language and Silence

The capacity for human language has been one of the central tenets of the human/animal division. The idea of nonhuman animals as outside the sphere of language goes back to Aristotle (Taylor 2017, 49). This view of animals as non-linguistic has been challenged not only by the extensive scientific information on the communication systems of animals, but also by the fact that many primates have learned human sign languages, such as ASL (Taylor 2017, 54). The vast and complex debate concerning the similarities and differences between human language and the communication systems of other species is outside the limits of this thesis. However, I would like to pay attention to the problems Taylor (ibid.) identifies with conjoining the value of nonhuman animals to their capacity to learn human language or the similarity of their communication systems to human language, as such evaluation is entirely based on human standards. Furthermore, as Taylor (2017, 58) points out, there are many humans who only have limited access to (spoken) human language, such as young children, people with various kinds of disabilities, or persons who have not acquired language proficiency in their early childhood due to unusual circumstances.

In *Wicked*, speech is the most outwardly noticeable feature that distinguishes Animals from animals, "speech" being first among the capacities that Animals gain in the myths of their origin (*Wicked* 125). Whereas the university town of Shiz, initially, is full of Animals, Glinda thinks that at her home area in rural Gillikin there is not even "the odd chicken squawking philosophically" (*Wicked* 67) — speech marking the presence of intelligence. In Shiz university, a life sciences class is based around speech. Dr. Nikidik brings a live lion cub to class, asking the students if they can tell whether the cub in question is a lion or a Lion. The cub is too young to yet to be able to speak in any case, so the lesson is a trick question with propagandistic goals, intended to legitimize the anti-animal policies of the regime. Elphaba, present in the class, reacts by pointing out the ethical and moral ramifications of the lesson at hand, commenting that the cub's mother could answer the question. It is noteworthy, though, that Dr. Nikidik's propagandistic thought experiment is based around the capacity to produce verbal language, something that differentiates animals and Animals, and moreover animals and humans — never mind that infant humans are not capable of speech either.

Even among those humans within the boundaries of normative language capacity, language is interlinked with power and societal hierarchies. The speech of women and other marginalised groups has been actively silenced, both by institutions and by cultural value systems. As part of their increasing political repression, anthropomorphic Animals are silenced, and their speech is policed. In a poetry soiree in Shiz university, Madame Morrible reads a poem ending with "Animals should be seen and not heard" (*Wicked* 84). This causes commotion among the Animal members of faculty present in the soiree. When Elphaba later questions Madame Morrible about the poem, she reacts by emphasising the ambiguity and potential irony of the particular poetic metre at hand, refusing to either confirm or deny whether she herself understands the final line as ironic or not (*Wicked* 90). When Dr. Dillamond and other Animal academics protest the poem, Madame Morrible frames them as emotionally biased and ignorant of poetic conventions, silencing them by dismissing their competence. Later Madame Morrible silences Dr. Dillamond in a very literal and permanent way, by having him assassinated.

Even as the text establishes a language-based division between Animals and animals, it at the same time begins to trouble this division. When visiting her childhood home as an adult, Elphaba encounters a pair of enslaved Sheep who are either unable to speak as a result of trauma or refuse to do so as an act of passive resistance. When hearing from the Cow accompanying the Sheep that they do not talk anymore, Elphaba asks if they have become ordinary sheep, the presence or absence of language once again demarcating the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, or in this case Animal and animal. However, the Cow informs her that the Sheep merely no longer speak because of the trauma they have gone through. Language capacity is not a fixed property of an individual but may vary along the timeline of their life. As such, the idea of language as a foundation of the animal/Animal division becomes questionable.

In some ways, language use is also tied to identity, in the sense of it being a prerequisite for identity. After Fiyero's death, Elphaba spends long periods in silence in a cloister. Thinking back to these years, she describes this experience in terms of a loss of individual identity:

> The benefit of a uniform was that one need not struggle to be unique […] One could sink selflessly into the daily pattern, one could find one's way without groping. [...] Three years of absolute silence, two years of whisper, and then, moved up (and outward) by the decision of the Superior Maunt, two years on the ward for incurables. (*Wicked* 227)

While Elphaba finds refuge in silence, her encounter with a former college friend of hers, Tibbett, as one of the dying patients in the cloister hospital, has her return to speech and the notion of individuality:

> Weak, unable to shit or piss without help, his skin falling in rags and parchment, he was better at life than she was. He selfishly *required that she be an individual*, and he *addressed her by her name*. He joked, he remembered stories, he criticized old friends for abandoning him, he noticed the differences in how she moved from day to day, how she thought. He reminded her that she did think. Under the scrutiny of his tired frame *she was re-created, against her will, as an individual. Or nearly.* (*Wicked*, 227–228; emphases mine)

While the negation of personal identity in the cloister is compounded by silence, Tibbet addressing Elphaba by her name calls her into being as an individualised subject. In contrast, over the course of the last two parts of the novel, the focalised third-person narration ceases referring to Elphaba by her personal name and instead begins to refer to her as just "the Witch", marking a shift in her sense of self and identity. Elphaba discusses the matter of names with the enslaved Cow she meets on her visit to Munchkinland. The Cow has decided to no longer use her name in public, explaining that "It's not afforded me any individual rights to have an individual name. I reserve it for my private use" (*Wicked* 315). Elphaba replies that she feels the same and calls herself just the Witch now. The encounter between Elphaba and the Cow is mired with tension. For all her good intentions Elphaba is unable to aid the Cow in a meaningful way, while the Cow, jaded by the numerous abuses she has experienced, mistrusts Elphaba, seeing her attempts to help her to be ultimately facile and futile. This matter of names, however, is something that they share and would appear to reach a tentative agreement on. For Elphaba and the Cow, for different reasons, personalised identity and a personal name is either unhelpful or unfeasible.

During her years living in Kiamo Ko, Elphaba attempts to teach her snow monkey companion, Chistery, to speak. Eventually Chistery succeeds at gaining at least a partial language proficiency. The acquisition of human language crosses not only species boundaries, but also the animal/Animal boundary. Along with his language acquisition process Chistery also gains other anthropomorphic qualities, gradually beginning to act less in ways typically identified with nonhuman animals and more in ways identified with humans. This gives ground to Burger's (2009, 150) claim that the winged monkeys "represent the intersection of two kinds of Animal — both animal and Animal." It also shares parallels with Kumbricia's role in Animal creation myths discussed in section 3.3, Elphaba using magic to give animals

the capacity of speech. Elphaba herself thinks about it in terms of continuity and shared materiality, stating that “[t]here is no difference [...]. The strands are the same, the skeins are the same; the rock remembers; the water has memory; the air has a past for which it can be held accountable”, asking Chistery to “[r]emember how to speak” (*Wicked* 269). Since speech is possible for some creatures, there is the possibility that it can be assumed by others. At the same time, this language acquisition process is simultaneous with the violence Elphaba inflicts on the bodies of snow monkeys by rendering them into winged monkeys, which I discuss in the following chapter.

5 Neither and Both: Hybrid Beings

So far, I have mostly examined how *Wicked* draws parallels between pairs of binary oppositions, such as culture/nature, human/animal and male/female. In this chapter I discuss how the novel deploys hybridity to unsettle these categories. The themes of hybridity and bodies that are partly human, partly nonhuman are already present in Baum's Oz novels, which feature many humanoid creatures constructed of composite parts, such as the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Patchwork Girl (Baum 1900; 1913). In Maguire's novel, likewise, there are several hybrid characters. While Scarecrow and Tin Man feature as peripheral characters in *Wicked*, more focus is given to other kinds of hybrid beings, namely anthropomorphic Animals and the winged monkeys constructed by Elphaba. Elphaba herself, as I discuss in this section, is in many ways a hybrid character, which in turn impacts her relations to both the Animals and the winged monkeys.

5.1 Hybridity in Oz

In *Wicked*, Anthropomorphic Animals can be considered hybrid in the sense that they have animal bodies but anthropomorphic minds and abilities such as speech. It is perhaps this hybrid quality that renders Animals as a group vulnerable to political and societal oppression, as their existence questions the dualist separation of categories such as human/animal or culture/nature. The Wizard's regime is in many ways invested in the pursuit of mastery of nature and the exploitation of natural resources at the expense of ecosystems and indigenous populations. At the start of his reign, the Wizard launches a campaign for mining rubies and drying wetlands in the Quadling Country. As the decades-long drought in Oz continues, the regime makes plans to access the alleged underground water deposits in Vinkus. While to the privileged imperial core the Wizard's policies mean industrialisation, technological development and economic growth, to the people and nonhuman nature in the imperial periphery they simply mean horrors (*Wicked* 54).

In terms of ideology, the Wizard's regime seems to be brutally rationalist, with a deeply instrumentalising relationship to nature. This kind of relationship requires what Plumwood (1994, 49) terms as radical exclusion or hyperseparation: the subordinated side of a dualism must be imagined as fundamentally discontinuous from and wholly alien to the master side. As the existence of anthropomorphic Animals challenges the idea of nonhuman nature not only as a passive and exploitable resource but also as something discontinuous and separate

from humans, it is perhaps part of the same pattern that the Wizard's regime would choose to target Animals as scapegoats.

Elphaba, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, also exists on this boundary between human and animal, culture and nature. Throughout the novel, seemingly oppositional concepts merge together in Elphaba's character, contesting binary oppositions (Frohreich 2009, 136). These contradictory meanings make her hybrid on a symbolic level. Her birth inside the Clock of the Time Dragon contains contesting motifs of mythological and scientific worldviews: while the clock is named after and identified by the mythical beast on top it, the cogs of clockwork inside the cart might insinuate the Cartesian mechanistic worldview, often expressed by the well-known metaphor of nature as clockwork (Plumwood 1994, 116). Furthermore, the women present at Elphaba's birth are at first uncertain about her genitalia, implying that she is intersex. This theme of hybrid compositions follows Elphaba to her adulthood.

Sarima, Fiyero's widow, tells her about the idea in her culture that anger is divided by sex, men's anger being "hot" and proactive and women's anger being "cold" and passive-aggressive. Elphaba, though sceptical as to "if [angers] divided by the sexes" (*Wicked* 286), blends these notions of masculine hot anger and feminine cold anger together in a deadly manner as she drops an icicle on Manek, Sarima's son. Like with Elphaba killing the cook, this is not fully deliberate on her part; rather, magic once again accomplishes her partly subconscious wish. On the one hand, Elphaba kills a child, but Manek is a violent bully that the text insinuates would grow up to be a likewise violent, patriarchal man. A similarly ethically questionable yet effective combination of seemingly oppositional gendered concepts occurs as Elphaba combines science and magic to create the winged monkeys.

Eventually it is revealed that the mysterious traveller who had a sexual relationship with Elphaba's mother is the Wizard of Oz. As the Wizard is originally from Earth, Elphaba is a hybrid of Ozian and Earthling. Gray (2007, 172) describes her as a "liminal child born betwixt-and-between fantasy and reality." This hybridity enables her to read the Grimmerie, a magical book that also originates on Earth. Elphaba's magical abilities may also be caused by this, or by the green elixir that is the likeliest cause of her colour and other physical differences. For the most part of the novel, Elphaba is unaware of her own origins and her hybrid nature. Near the end of the novel, she encounters the dwarf who maintains the Clock of the Time Dragon, a clockwork puppet theatre with the power to show the past and the future. As the clock reveals Elphaba's origins to her, the dwarf tells her that

> you […] are neither this nor that – or shall I say both this and that? [...] You are a half-breed, you are a new breed, you are a grafted limb, you are a dangerous anomaly. Always you were drawn to the composite creatures, the broken and reassembled, for that is what you are. Can you be so dull that you have not figured this out? (*Wicked* 373–374)

The dwarf describes Elphaba as “neither” and “both” Ozian and Earthling, “a grafted limb”, a “dangerous anomaly” (Wicked 374). The danger posed by the “anomaly” of Elphaba’s existence echoes Cohen’s ([1996] 2020, 40) view of monsters and hybrids as “harbinger for category crisis”, upsetting the very fabric of Oz. However, the same thing that contributes to her Otherness in Oz functions to bring her closer to the reader, as the reader is from Earth. At the same time, the Earth in the novel, never visited but seen as glimpses through an Ozian point of view, is depicted as a mysterious and potentially magical place: the Grimmerie, perhaps the single most magical object in Oz, originates from Earth. For the reader this creates an effect of alienation and defamiliarization, as Earth, the reader’s home planet, is rendered into an alien space of mystery and magic, while the originally fairytale-like land of Oz is demystified.

According to the dwarf, this liminal, hybrid status between the two worlds is what explains Elphaba’s affinity for “composite creatures, the broken and reassembled” (Wicked 374). The most obvious point of reference for this is Animals, who can be understood as human–nonhuman hybrids. Furthermore, “the broken and the reassembled” may also refer to Elphaba’s own experimentation with implanting wings on monkeys. Already as a small child Elphaba seems to show preference for “broken” things: receiving a toy bird from her father, she immediately removes its wings. Her father Frex interprets this as Elphaba breaking the toy with the intent to destroy it. However, Turtle Heart, who comes from a markedly different culture than Frex, sees Elphaba’s actions as her modifying the toy for her own use, finding that “[s]he is herself pleased at the half things [...]. The little girl to play with the broken pieces better” (Wicked 39). In her adult age this tendency surfaces in a more twisted manner, as Elphaba creates winged monkeys by grafting bird wings on the backs of snow monkeys, a process that is simultaneously both destructive and creative.

5.2 Science as Deconstruction, Magic as Synthesis

In Oz, magic is a commonly acknowledged reality, sorcery being a well-established academic discipline. In college, Glinda, Elphaba’s friend, chooses to major in sorcery. In one of her classes, the instructor, Miss Greyling, explains:

> Science [...] is the systematic dissection of nature, to reduce it to working parts that more or less obey universal laws. Sorcery moves in the opposite direction. It doesn't rend, it repairs. It is synthesis rather than analysis. It builds anew rather than revealing the old. [...] It doesn't pose or represent the world. It becomes. (*Wicked* 142–143)

In this passage, science is viewed as dissection, analysis or deconstruction, whereas sorcery is described as creative synthesis. Burger (2009, 222) reads here a "critique of rationality itself, tangentially aligned with the empiricism of scientific inquiry." Similarly, feminism has had an ambivalent relationship to natural science, feminists variably viewing natural science as something with liberating potential or a threat, often recognising both aspects (Lykke 1996a, 2). These tensions have been partly due to the feminist questioning of the positivist and empiricist traditions of natural science (Lykke 1996a, 3). Furthermore, feminists have addressed how modern scientific discourse constructed itself upon hierarchical dualisms between the white, intellectual, educated and 'objective' male scientist and the objects of his study, which were construed as passive, natural and embodied, and often as female, working-class, non-white, or non-human (Lykke 1996a, 4).

This problematic relationship between feminism and natural science is perhaps especially salient in ecofeminist theory, as ecofeminists have critiqued scientific theories and methodologies for their treatment of nonhuman animals and nature. As Gruen (1993, 64) and Donovan (1993, 174) outline, the rise of the mechanistic worldview and the scientific method from the sixteenth century onwards led to women and nature being studied as scientific objects and utilised as tools by men in the subsequent developments of industrialisation. Gruen (1993, 66) sees this mindset behind the scientific practices of performing experiments on nonhuman animals in laboratory settings, which reduce "animals to objects devoid of feelings, desires, and interests." This "cultivation of continued detachment" with regards to nonhuman animals, and the practice of viewing the "experimental subject as an inferior, "subhuman" Other — as a "specimen" (ibid.) rationalises the violence inflicted on them.

This objectifying mindset can be seen behind the actions of Dr. Nikidik, who brings a live lion cub to class, intending to perform experiments on it. In the context of the lesson, the lion cub is used both as a test subject and a propagandistic thought experiment, the question posed being that if the cub cannot speak yet, who can tell if it is an animal or an Animal. Elphaba's pragmatic response to this is that "its mother can. Where is its mother?" (*Wicked* 145). Dr. Nikidik is dismissive of Elphaba's questioning, painting Elphaba's reaction as sentimental, naïve and lacking in intellectual finesse. Though Elphaba indeed is, at this point in the novel,

rather naïve, she is also right: for Dr. Nikidik to bring a live lion cub to class, it must have first been separated from its mother. The mother and the origin of the cub in Dr. Nikidik's account is, in Plumwood's (1994, 21; 48–49) terms, backgrounded, simultaneously concealed and taken for granted, time necessary but not worthy of mention. Whereas Dr. Nikidik treats the cub, whom he has named Brrr, as a mere means to demonstrate an abstract scientific question or a philosophical dilemma, Elphaba focuses on the material preconditions behind the lesson at hand, exposing the violence in Dr. Nikidik's methods.

While Dr. Nikidik employs science to legitimise the oppression of Animals, Elphaba and Dr. Dillamond also engage in scientific research. The object of Dr. Dillamond's research is to find scientific basis for the claim that there is no essential difference between humans and Animals, comparing samples of animal, Animal and human tissue. Dr. Dillamond and Elphaba argue for the rights of Animals largely with the same arguments that philosophers have argued for the rights of humans and by extension some animals, asserting that they are rational beings (Taylor 2017, 67). From the point of view of animal rights or ecology movements this might be a troubled strategy, as it centres bringing Animals into the same category with humans, one that is entitled to rights and dignity, while the question of ethical treatment of non-anthropomorphic animals remains an open one. Though Elphaba considers also the possibility that "there isn't any difference, deep down in the invisible pockets of human and Animal flesh — that there's no difference between us — or even among us, if you take in animal flesh too" (*Wicked* 110), suggesting a continuity between all categories, this distinction between animals and Animals may be a troubled point in the novel. Over the course of the novel Elphaba connects with several non-anthropomorphic nonhuman animals, such as Chistery the monkey, Killyjoy the dog and a swarm of bees. At the same time, it could be argued that non-anthropomorphic nonhuman animals are her moral or ethical blind spot, as most explicitly exemplified by her creation of winged monkeys by a series of scientific and magical experimentation.

Previously I have considered how Elphaba is likened to nonhuman nature and animals in the novel. At the same time, the novel does not resort to simplistic oppositions between masculine culture and feminine nature. While such juxtapositions have served as basis for some ecofeminist or cultural feminist utopias, Plumwood (1994, 7–8) notes that they only essentialise the woman–nature connection, validating women's exclusion from the male-coded spheres of rationality and culture. Furthermore, such views idealise women in a manner that has no connection to the lived realities of women's lives, ignoring their capacity for harm,

callousness or violence (Plumwood 1994, 9). However, Elphaba's connectedness to nature and animals in *Wicked* does not preclude her from participating in the stereotypically male-coded practices of science, learning and thinking, instead, she is part of both culture and nature. Moreover, her affinity with nonhuman creatures does not render her innocent or incapable of violence or harm, as exemplified by the winged monkeys she creates on which I elaborate in the following section.

5.3 Hybridity and Violence

During her years of living in near-isolation in Kiamo Ko, Elphaba performs experiments on non-anthropomorphic snow monkeys by science and magic, sewing wings of birds on them and trying to teach them to fly. Though she regrets that many of her first attempts die on the operation table, Elphaba dismisses the harm caused to the rest, thinking that they seem "mostly happy with their lot" (*Wicked* 334). However, at this stage of the novel, Elphaba's mental state has become markedly erratic and her reliability as a narrator is reduced by her increasing paranoia and single-mindedness. I think this passage is another such case of unreliability: the reader is not told what the monkeys themselves really think about being experimented on and mutilated.

Here Elphaba's affinity for "composite creatures" and hybrids becomes apparent in a violent manner, whereas elsewhere in the novel it enables her to feel compassion and kinship with them. An interesting connection to this is the implication earlier in the novel that Elphaba may also herself be a victim of bodily mutilation. The fact that the women present at her birth are initially confused over her genitalia insinuates that Elphaba is intersex. Later Fiyero sees a glimpse of scarring near her pelvis. The implication seems to be that Elphaba was genitally mutilated as a child, as many intersex infants in our world have been. Elphaba, then, may be a mutilated body creating more mutilated bodies, repeating her own trauma by inflicting it on others.

In her creation of the monkeys, Elphaba combines multiple disciplines and arts. She attaches wings on them by sewing, which is traditionally considered a very feminine, domestic practice, repurposed by Elphaba for what can be considered as either scientific research or animal abuse, just as she repurposes a broom, a tool typically used for feminised domestic labour, for flight. While Elphaba uses Fiyero's old schoolbooks from Dr. Nikidik's courses as reference, she also uses a spell found in the Grimmerie to "to convince the axial nerves to think skyward instead of treeward" (*Wicked* 334). Both science and magic contribute to the

creation of the monkeys, Elphaba combining the two to create a new kind of hybrid being. At the same time, the violence inherent in the process raises the question of whether Elphaba has internalised the objectifying scientific mindset exemplified in the text by Dr. Nikidik. While Elphaba does care for the monkeys, they are simultaneously beloved animal companions and test specimens of scientific interest. She is simultaneously inhabiting the roles of their mother and the scientist observing them, relating to them, as Burger (2009, 150) puts it, with both "dotage and revulsion of her unnatural motherhood." Even so, the alliance between Elphaba and nonhuman animals inevitably becomes troubled as she inflicts violence on them.

These issues of ethics and violence are also present in discussions concerning hybridity in real life. Weisberg (2014, 98–99), for instance, has critiqued posthumanist scholars for too uncritical celebration of hybridity, accusing them of a cavalier approach to the ethical issues and violence inherent in the creation of species hybrids in scientific settings. Uncomfortable connections between hybridity and violence are by no means exceptional: as hybridity is most often discussed in contexts where there is some kind of conflict of interest or imbalance of power (Kuortti 2024, 11), it seems almost inevitable that many of these circumstances are to varying extents violent. As such, the concept of hybridity has never been construed innocent, nor has it been uncontroversial. Desblache (2012, 246) argues that these ethical risks apply especially when it comes to hybrids produced by sciences such as biotechnology, where power relations are fundamentally imbalanced, often at the expense of nonhuman animal test subjects. Likewise, Plumwood (2001, 28) finds mere crossing of boundaries as such to be an insufficient strategy. While Plumwood admits that acknowledging "continuity and overlap" of nature and culture is essential for deconstructing dualistic oppositions, some boundary breakdowns may instead contribute to colonising mastery of human and earth Others (ibid.).

How to understand hybridity that is connected to violence is an ethically tricky ground. Along with Desblache and Plumwood, I find that a cautious approach to boundary crossings is at times necessary, especially when it comes to crossings that contribute to exploitation or instrumentalization of humans or nonhuman others. But a solution to these ethical issues cannot be a return to a definition of hybrid beings as abject and contaminated. Such a view has long enough served as the only possible discourse of hybridity (Papastergiadis [1997] 2015, 257). Accepting the existence of hybrid beings does not have to equal condoning the possible violent circumstances of their creation. Furthermore, as Lykke (1996b, 17) points out, no pure identity politics is possible, since no identity is entirely pure; instead, hybridity

can and should be admitted and affirmed. As such the question becomes how to relate to hybridity that is already there, including hybridity with violent roots.

Hybridity in *Wicked* is not portrayed as inherently virtuous, innocent or ethically unproblematic. Rather, it is often connected to or caused by violence. Elphaba's own hybrid nature is likely a result of rape, which would seem to invite understanding of her hybridity in terms of abjection or tragedy. Though both of these notions certainly are present in Elphaba's "twisted" life (*Wicked* 4), her being cannot be reduced to either of them. It is implied that her Ozian-Earthling hybridity enables Elphaba to read the Grimmerie. Negotiating with Elphaba for the Grimmerie, the Wizard assumes that only Earthlings would be able to read the book. He is surprised to learn that Elphaba can understand some of it, though her skills are imperfect. The ability to read the Grimmerie, in turn, allows for Elphaba to learn to fly and pose a more substantial threat to the regime of the Wizard, the same man who likely raped her mother. Rather than being reduced to the violent conditions of her origin, Elphaba may opt to resist them. As such, the novel does not resort to either uncritical celebration or dejection of hybridity but envisions it as something that can take directions not prescribed by the circumstances that created it.

6 Conclusion

As several scholars (Gray 2007; Burger 2009; Frohreich 2009; Graham 2019) have established, *Wicked* addresses culturally well-established tropes of witches and monstrosity in a subversive manner. Similarly, in this thesis I have examined how earth, plant and animal metaphors are deployed in the novel in a manner which, in Alaimo's (2000, 136) terms, re-articulates the cultural connection between women and nature with a vengeance. While Elphaba's body is compared to animal and vegetal life, this affinity with nonhuman nature does not reduce her to the tropes of abject monster, naturalised earth mother or deprive her of agency. The position of anthropomorphic Animals in the novel is further relevant to this. As I have discussed, one of the many possible points of comparison of the subordination of anthropomorphic animals in the novel is the historical subordination of women in patriarchal societies. The points of convergence between the positions of Animals and Elphaba also partially enable her solidarity with Animals, as her body is also construed as animalistic and deviant by societal standards.

One more thing that connects Elphaba and Animals is that both can be understood as hybrid characters, shifting between what is construed as culture and nature. While hybridity has been historically connotated with notions such as monstrosity and contamination, neither Elphaba nor Animals are reducible to those tropes. However, even as hybridity is deployed to break solid categories, it is not imagined as inherently virtuous but coexisting with ethical issues. Elphaba, herself possibly a product of a violation of bodily integrity, violates the bodies of monkeys as she transplants wings on them. Nevertheless, hybrid beings may resist the violent conditions that produced them. Throughout her life Elphaba struggles to find effective ways of resistance. At points, this seems like an impossible task, the Wizard's regime being so powerful it is almost intractable. Even though the Wizard's reign ends at the end of the novel, so does Elphaba's life, the question remaining being what her resistance really amounted to.

In many ways the story of *Wicked* follows the classical tragic plot, in which the hero(ine) starts out as noble but becomes corrupted as the story heads towards her inevitable destruction. Though originally well-intentioned, Elphaba grows increasingly ethically compromised and mentally unstable as she faces multiple adversities. Like Baum's original Wicked Witch of the West, she dies as Dorothy throws a bucket of water on her. She fails to accomplish her goals, such as rescuing Fiyero's remaining family or aiding to liberate enslaved Animals. While the Wizard's regime does collapse at the end of the novel, Elphaba

does not live to see him fall. As such, Burger (2009, 245) asserts that the limitations to Elphaba's agency and her ultimate destruction curtail the novel's feminist potential. The fate of the Wicked Witch, Burger (ibid). argues, "proves inescapable, curtailing the celebration of the strong and independent woman with her familiar and seemingly inevitable destruction". In a more postmodern vein, Frohreich (2009, 138) attests that Elphaba's ultimate destruction demonstrates that there is "no escape" from identity construction within the cultural structures of power that would define her as abject.

Even as *Wicked* elsewhere uses elements from Baum's novel and the 1939 film selectively, creatively and subversively, it retains the Witch's death by Dorothy and a bucket of water. However, the way Elphaba's character is complicated in the text produces a significant shift in the framing of the event. Whereas in *The Wizard of Oz* the death of the Witch is — after Dorothy's initial shock — framed as an unambiguously triumphant event, the reframing of the event in *Wicked* allows for markedly different responses. If anything, the reader is left with a sense of tragedy and unrealised potential, as Elphaba's life ends abruptly by the way of a fatal misunderstanding. At the same time, what makes it difficult to formulate any definitive reading of Elphaba's death is the ambiguity in the novel as to what extent her fate is the result of the "punishing political climate of Oz", her personal choices, a series of unfortunate coincidences, or some combination of these.

I do not think that tragic narratives as such need to be considered inherently unfeminist or regressive. Even though Elphaba's story does end with tragedy and destruction, this does not necessarily overrule every other aspect of her life. Throughout her life she negotiates for agency in an environment that would prefer her silence and compliance, forging alliances with other subordinated Others, both Animals and animals. At the same time, she herself is produced and conditioned by the harsh social and political environment of Oz, neither innocent nor invulnerable. There is room for acknowledging both agency and interdependence.

Like Plumwood (1993, 195) argues, while "the strands interwoven by this master story of colonisation form a mesh so strong, so finely knit and familiar it could almost pass for our own bodies", this control is never total, nor does it eradicate all possibility for resistance. Instead, as Plumwood (ibid.) finds that those subordinated have "still some power to reject the master's definition of [them] as passive bodies to be subsumed by his agency, mutilated, imprinted and conditioned." Fiction may be one site for this process of rejection and

rearticulation. An attempt to redefine masculinist tropes of women and nature is realised in *Wicked*. The mastery of nature is never complete: there remains space for resistance, even though the resistance may not be simple or easy.

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Finnish Summary

Analysoin tutkielmassani Gregory Maguiren romaania *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1996; suom. *Noita: Lännen ilkeän noidan elämä ja teot*, 2008) hyödyntäen ekofeminististä teoriaa. Maguiren *Wicked* on L. Frank Baumin lastenromaanin *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900; suom. *Ihmemaa Oz*, 2001; *Ozin velho*, 1985; ja *Oz-maan taikuri*, 1977), palimpsesti tai päällekirjoitus. Lisäksi se lainaa joitain elementtejä myös muista Baumin *Oz*-romaaneista sekä vuoden 1939 elokuvasovituksesta *The Wizard of Oz* (ohjaus Fleming & Vidor; suom. *Ihmemaa Oz*). *Wicked* kertoo *The Wizard of Ozin* antagonistin, Lännen Ilkeän Noidan (the Wicked Witch of the West), tarinan. Samalla se monimutkaistaa Baumin romaanin suhteellisen yksinkertaista hyvän ja pahan vastakkainasettelua. Vaikka *Wickedin* luonnetta päällekirjoituksena ei voi jättää huomiotta, käsittelen sitä tutkielmassani myös omana itsenäisenä teoksenaan, jonka kaikkia merkityksiä ei voi palauttaa suoraan Baumin teoksiin tai vuoden 1939 elokuvaan.

Tutkielman ensimmäinen ja toinen luku toimivat johdantona ja tutkielman teoreettisen taustan esittelynä. Hyödynnän tutkielmassani ekofeminististä teoriaa, erityisesti Plumwoodin (1994) analyysia siitä, miten naisen ja luonnon samastaminen länsimaisessa ajatusperinteessä on oikeuttanut sekä naisten että ei-inhimillisen luonnon riiston. Tämän konstruoidun yhteyden takia feminismin suhde luontoon on ollut ongelmallinen. Yleinen feministinen strategia nainen–luonto-rinnastuksen suhteen on ollut luonnon käsitteen torjuminen ja naisen kategorian sisällyttäminen länsimaisen humanismin ihmisen kategoriaan sellaisenaan. Toinen, erityisesti niin kutsutun kulttuurisen feminismin omaksuma lähestymistapa on vuorostaan nainen–luonto-rinnastuksen varaukseton hyväksyminen ja rationaalisuuden tai kulttuurin torjuminen. Plumwood (1994) ja Alaimo (2000) kuitenkin näkevät molemmat ratkaisut ongelmallisina. Tämän sijaan he ehdottavat niin kutsuttua kriittistä affirmaatiota tai kriittistä rekonstruktiota, jossa sekä naisen että luonnon käsitteet tulee muotoilla uudelleen tavalla, joka ei mahdollista kummankaan riistoa. Tämän sijaan naisen ja luonnon kulttuurista rinnastusta voi strategisesti uudelleen hyödyntää feministisiin päämääriin.

Tämän ekofeministisen teoreettisen taustan lisäksi hyödynnän tutkielmassani hirviön ja hybridin käsitteisiin liittyvää kulttuuriteoriaa. Käsitteet ovat länsimaisessa historiassa liittyneet tiiviisti toisiinsa, sillä hybridisyys on monissa diskursseissa liitetty hirviöyteen. Jälkistrukturalismista vaikutteita saaneessa postkolonialistisessa tutkimuksessa hybridi-käsitteelle on kuitenkin annettu merkitys, joka mahdollistaa myönteisemmän suhtautumisen

hybridiyteen. Hybridiys nähdään tässä kehikossa tapana ymmärtää kategorioiden välistä sekoittumista ja vastavoimana 'puhtaisiin' identiteetteihin vetoavalle ajattelulle. Postkoloniaalisesta tutkimuksesta käsite on levinnyt myös esimerkiksi posthumanistiseen tutkimukseen, jossa sitä on hyödynnetty esimerkiksi ihmisten, muunlajisten eläinten ja teknologioiden välisten yhteenliittymien käsittelyssä.

Samalla suhteellisen uusi ja marginaalinen *monster theory* -kenttä on kiinnostunut hirviöyden kulttuurisista merkityksistä ja siitä, miten hirviöyttä tuotetaan diskursiivisesti. Hirviön käsite ymmärretään diskursiivisena rakenteena, joka heijastaa kulttuurisia pelkoja eikä ole poliittisesti neutraali (Weinstock 2020, 25). Monet hirviöt ja hybridit heijastavat nimenomaan kategorioiden sekoittumiseen liittyviä pelkoja (Cohen 2020, 40). Todellisuudessa hybridisyys on pikemminkin normi kuin poikkeus, mutta hierarkkisten erontekojen ylläpitäminen vaatii sen torjunnan (Lykke 1996, 17). Tarkkarajaisiin erontekoihin perustuva ajattelutapa sekä tuottaa hybridit että torjuu ne hirviömäisinä (mt.). Hybridin ja hirviön käsitteiden potentiaalit siis koostuvat niiden mahdollisuudesta hämärtää binäärisiä, hierarkkisia erontekoja.

Wickediä on luettu uudelleentulkintana paitsi Baumin teoksista ja vuoden 1939 elokuvasta, myös noitiin ja hirviömäisiin naishahmoihin liittyvistä troopeista laajemmin. Romaanin Lännen Ilkeä Noita, Elphaba, on samanaikaisesti yhteydessä näihin trooppeihin mutta samalla myös moniulotteinen hahmo. Teksti käyttää noita-käsitteen latautuneita konnotaatioita subversiivisella tavalla. Tämän lisäksi katson, että teksti hyödyntää ei-inhimilliseen luontoon liittyviä metaforia tavoilla, jotka uudelleentulkitsevat naisen ja luonnon välistä kulttuurista rinnastusta. Käsittelen näitä teemoja tutkielman kolmannessa luvussa eli sen ensimmäisessä analyysiluvussa. Sovellan erityisesti Alaimon (2000) ehdotusta siitä, että kaunokirjallinen teksti voi uudelleentulkita naisen ja luonnon välistä rinnastusta tavalla, joka mahdollistaa toimijuuden sekä naisille että ei-inhimilliselle luonnolle. Romaanin metaforinen kieli yhdistää Elphaban ja tämän ruumiin ei-inhimilliseen luontoon, kasveihin ja eläimiin. Tämä ei kuitenkaan pelkistä Elphabaa vakiintuneisiin sukupuolittuneisiin luontotrooppeihin tai vähennä hänen toimijuuttaan.

Länsimaisen satuperinteen noitia voi käsitellä paitsi hirviömäisinä naisina, myös ekofobisina hirviöhahmoina. Erityisesti Baumin *The Wizard of Ozin* Lännen Ilkeä Noita linkittyy tiiviisti ei-inhimillisiin elollisiin olentoihin, sillä tämä kykenee hallitsemaan erilaisia muunlajisia eläimiä kuten susia, mehiläisiä, variksia ja lentäviä apinoita. Myös *Wickedissä* Elphaba muodostaa suhteita näihin eläimiin. Kuitenkin siinä missä Baumin romaanin Lännen Ilkeän

Noidan kontrolloimat eläimet toimivat tekstissä ainoastaan vastuksina Dorothylle, *Wickedissä* Elphaban ja tämän kumppanieläinten suhteet kuvataan merkityksellisinä. Elphaballa on kyky vaikuttaa eläinten toimintaan, mutta samoin myös kumppanieläimet vaikuttavat Elphabaan metaforisella tasolla, sillä Elphabaa koskevat metaforat tekstissä rinnastavat hänet näihin kumppanieläimiin. Myös Elphaban romaanin aikana oppima kyky lentää luudalla yhdistää tämän nimenomaan lentäviin kumppanieläimiin, variksiin ja lentäviin apinoihin.

Wickedissä on Elphaban lisäksi myös muita noitia tai noidaksi tulkittavissa olevia hahmoja. Tekstin sisäisessä maailmassa noidan arkkityyppiä edustaa Kumbricia (the Kumbric Witch). Siinä missä Baumin romaanin ja erityisesti vuoden 1939 elokuvan Lännen Ilkeä Noidan voi nähdä pohjoisamerikkalaisen kulttuurin arkkityyppisenä noitana, *Wickedissä* Kumbricialla on samankaltainen rooli Ozin mytologiassa. Kumbricia rinnastuu tekstissä Elphabaan, mutta myös muihin naishahmoihin, kuten Yackleen, Madame Morribleen ja Dorothyyn. Rakentamalla näin yhteyksiä näiden hahmojen välille teksti vihjaa, että kenet tahansa heistä voi tulkita noidaksi tai nähdä edustavan noidan roolia. Tämän lisäksi Kumbricia on linkittynyt hirviömäiseen, feminiiniseen luontoon, joka on sekä tuhoava että uutta luova. Myös tältä osin romaani hyödyntää nainen–luonto-rinnastusta tavalla, joka kuvaa luonnon toimijana. Sekä Kumbrician assosiaatio luonnonvoimiin että Elphaban ruumiiseen yhdistetyt zoomorfiset ja luontometaforat hahmottavat luonnon toimijana, joka kykenee vastustamaan romaanin Ozin patriarkaalisia ja antroposentrisiä rakenteita.

Sekä Elphabaa koskevat zoomorfiset ja luontometaforat että romaanin antropomorfiset Eläimet hämärtävät inhimillisen ja ei-inhimillisen välistä rajaa. Tutkielman neljäs luku eli sen toinen käsittelyluku käsittelee antropomorfismin käyttöä *Wickedissä* kolmesta eri näkökulmasta. Romaanin sisäisessä maailmassa on kahdenlaisia eläinhahmoja, antropomorfisia Eläimiä (Animals) ja ei-antropomorfisia eläimiä (animals), jotka erotetaan toisistaan isoilla ja pienillä alkukirjaimilla. Simons (2001, 118–120) jakaa antropomorfismin kirjallisuudessa ‘triviaaliin’ ja ‘vahvaan’ antropomorfismiin. Siinä missä Simons tarkoittaa triviaalilla antropomorfismilla lähes mitä tahansa ihmismäisten eläinhahmojen kuvausta, vahva antropomorfismi haastaa tai kyseenalaistaa ihmisen ja eläimen välistä hierarkkista kahtiajakoa (Simons 2001, 118–120; Lammi 2023). Näen *Wickedin* Eläimet Simonsin jatkumolla lähempänä vahvaa antropomorfismia. Myös Baumin *Oz*-romaaneissa esiintyy niin antropomorfisia kuin ei-antropomorfisia eläinhahmoja. Lajityypin muutos lastenromaanista aikuisille suunnatuksi fantasiaromaaniksi kuitenkin paitsi vaatii systemaattisempaa

maailmanrakennusta, myös mahdollistaa Wickedille antropomorfismin käsittelemisen tavalla, joka monimutkaistaa ihmisen ja eläimen välistä rajanvetoa.

Wickedin antropomorfisia Eläimiä on usein luettu allegoriana erilaisten ihmisryhmien sorrolle. Niin Eläinten kuin Elphaban fiktiivisen Toiseuden voikin lukea niin kutsuttuna avoimena metaforana, jolla ei ole suoraa kuvattavaa vastinetta todellisessa maailmassa. Ei kuitenkaan ole yhdentekevää, että metaforan kuva (*vehicle*) on juuri antropomorfiset eläimet. Useiden ihmisryhmien, kuten esimerkiksi naisten tai vammaisten ihmisten, toiseuttaminen on historiallisesti perustunut näiden rinnastamiseen muunlajisiin eläimiin, minkä puolestaan on mahdollistanut eläinten asema ihmisen Toisena. Näen romaanissa mahdollisuuden tarkastella ei-inhimillisen luonnon hyväksikäytön ja erilaisten ihmisryhmien toiseuttamisen välisiä yhteyksiä, sillä romaani muodostaa rinnastuksia Elphaban ja Eläinten välille. Viittaan näiden aihepiirien tarkastelussa ekofeministisen teoretisointiin feminisoidun työn ja ei-inhimillisen luonnon ja eläinten hyväksikäytön välisistä yhteyksistä.

Tämän lisäksi sekä Elphaban että Eläinten toiseuttaminen romaanissa on linkittynyt näiden ruumiisiin ja fyysiseen poikkeavuuteen suhteessa Ozin yhteiskunnallisiin ja kulttuurisiin normeihin. Käsittelen näitä teemoja hyödyntämällä ekologisen feminismin ohella kriittistä vammaistutkimusta. Tällä teoriakentällä vammaisuus ymmärretään niin kutsutun vammaisuuden sosiaalisen mallin mukaan kulttuurisena, sosiaalisena ja poliittisena ilmiönä, jossa tietynlaisia ruumiita ja kyvykkyyksiä priorisoidaan suhteessa toisiin ruumiisiin. Koska Ozin yhteiskunta on niin kulttuurisesti kuin arkkitehtuuriltaan rakentunut ihmiskehon normin mukaan, Eläinten pääsy yhteiskuntaan on rajoitettu myös fyysisellä tasolla. Elphaban sisarella Nessarosella on näkyvä fyysinen vamma, mutta myös Elphaban vesi-intoleranssin voi ymmärtää vammauttavana, koska se rajoittaa hänen toimintakykyään ja tunteenilmaisuaan. Tämä ristiriita ruumiiden ja fyysisen ja sosiaalisen rakennetun ympäristön välillä yhdistää Eläimiä ja Elphabaa.

Niin Elphaba kuin antropomorfiset eläinhahmot voidaan ymmärtää hybridisinä, liminaalisina hahmoina. Kummatkin hämärtävät ihmisen ja eläimen tai kulttuurin ja luonnon välistä rajantekoa. Mahdollisesti juuri se, että nämä kategoriat sekoittuvat Eläimissä, tekee Eläimistä Ozin hallinnon sortotoimien kohteen. Samoin Elphabaan yhdistyy tekstissä näennäisesti vastakkaisia merkityksiä, mikä myös asettaa hänet luonnon ja kulttuurin välimaastoon. Kuitenkaan hybridiyttä ei kuvata romaanissa välttämättä viattomana tai ongelmattomana, vaan se voi olla kytköksissä myös eettisiin ongelmiin ja väkivaltaan. Elphaban luomat

lentävät apinat ovat kahden eri eläinlajin välisiä hybridejä tai kimairoja. Luodakseen lentävät apinat Elphaba yhdistää luonnontieteitä ja taikuutta, näennäisesti vastakkaisia aloja. Samalla teko on väkivaltainen ja eettisesti ongelmallinen. Elphaban oma hybridiyskin saattaa liittyä väkivaltaan. Elphaban hahmo ei kuitenkaan pelkisty tekstissä tragediaan tai abjektioon, sillä tämä kykenee vastustamaan Ozin hallintoa ja sen sortotoimia. Hybridiset olennot eivät siis välttämättä pelkisty ne luoneisiin väkivaltaisiin olosuhteisiin, vaan ne voivat myös käyttää toimijuuttaan vastustaakseen näitä olosuhteita.

Wickedin tarina seuraa monella tavaa klassista traagista juonta, jonka myötä sankari tai sankaritar turmeltuu ja lopulta tuhoutuu. Elphaba kuolee samalla tavoin kuin Baumin romaanin ja vuoden 1939 elokuvan noita, kun Dorothy heittää vesiämpärin hänen päälleen. Tämä nostaa esiin kysymyksen Elphaban toimijuudesta ja siitä, miten paljon Elphaban vastarinnalla lopulta on merkitystä. Kuitenkin *Wickedissä* Noidan kuoleman kehystys muuttuu huomattavasti sen asettuessa romaanin kokonaisuuteen. Samoin teksti säilyttää monia tulkinnan mahdollisuuksia suhteessa Elphaban toimijuuteen ja toisaalta häntä laajempiin sosiaalisiin ja poliittisiin olosuhteisiin. Läpi romaanin Elphaba hakee toimijuuden mahdollisuuksia Ozin sosiaalisessa ja poliittisessa kontekstissa. Samalla hän on myös itse tämän kontekstin tuote.