English Thesis

27 May 2011

From Novel to Musical: A Study in Adaptation

Musical theatre is a genre unique to itself. A combination of the straight play, music, singing, and dance, the musical as we know it has progressed much since *The Black Crook* played on Broadway in the late nineteenth century.[1] While some musicals have their origins in the collaborators' collective imaginations, many musicals get their story lines from works in other mediums, including film, theatre, opera and literature. However, musicals derived from written narratives have fascinated me the most. While all adaptations have their challenges, there is something unique in adapting a novel into a musical.

There is a different experience in each medium. The novel, a long prose piece, is read alone, as the singular reader's mind engages with the narrator's written words. The musical, as live theatre, is seen in a performance space, while the plural audience watches and listens to any number of actors perform in real time. While these qualifiers by no means stand as rules for either form, the different experiences that people have in each medium indicate the changes writers, lyricists and composers have to make in creating a work of performance based on a work of literature.

This paper aims to analyze those changes. What does it mean to write a musical based on a novel? What are the changes made in the storyline, characters, and themes? Which characters and side plots get shortened or cut, and which ones get expanded on or added? Why do some musical adaptations become successful and others become the

dreaded Broadway flop? Are there some stories that cannot be told in the musical form? I will be looking at three musicals to answer the questions above: *Ragtime*, *Oliver!*, and *Wicked*. Each musical has made their Broadway debut; some of them have even been revived. Two of them have American origins, and one is strictly British. Each has received various levels of success and failure. And all have been adapted from novels.

I will look at how the original language of the novel is transformed into the dramatic language of its musical adaptation as shown through the following four productions:

The novel *Ragtime* is very American in origin, with its source book by E.L. Doctorow being a historical novel about the lives of three families and famous historical periods in the early 20th century. I will be looking at the plot and character changes, specifically in the diminishing of Houdini and other historical characters with the added significance of the three families, and the development of Mother and Father, and Younger Brother.

Based on the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, *Oliver!* is the only musical on this list with British creators in both mediums. The musical has often been thought of as a symbol of national pride in England. I will be looking at the plot and characters of the musical and its source novel, specifically with Oliver's position as the main character and the controversial anti-Semitism of Fagin's character.

Wicked the musical is just one adaptation of the ever evolving story of the Wizard of Oz. It is based on the novel by Gregory Maguire, who in turn based his story on both the film *The Wizard of Oz* and its source, the L. Frank Baum series of books that began

with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. With such a dizzying progression of adaptations, I will stay close to Maguire's retelling, told from the point of view of the Wicked Witch of the West, and the main storyline changes made to the musical.

Studying Adaptation

According to Simone Murray's essay "Materializing adaptation theory: the adaptation industry," adaptation studies have gone through three waves. The three waves she enumerates are fidelity criticism, structural criticism, and post-structural/ cultural studies criticism. Fidelity criticism looks at the changes an adaptation makes on its source material and how faithful the adaptation is. Structural criticism analyzes the changes in structure an adaptation makes and how these changes reflect each form. Cultural studies look at the social groups involved in producing and consuming the adaptations and their source material. In addition to these three waves, Murray proposes a fourth course of study, the adaptation industry. This mode of study involves analyzing "industrial dimensions of adaptation in contemporary media culture" (9). Murray argues that adaptation studies have "struggled to achieve academic respectability since its inception in the 1950s," which is partially due to a history of confining intellectual analyses, or the three waves enumerated above (1). Murray encourages adaptation scholars to analyze the financial, contextual, sociological ways that the producers (of both the source text and the adaptation) generate the work.

In addition to giving a structural and societal analysis of both the source texts and their musical adaptations, I wish to also understand the "adaptation industry." While Murray's argument is sound in saying that older forms of criticism such as structural

analysis are outdated, I will need to use structural and societal analyses in addition to looking at new adaptation industry form of criticism. Murray focuses her essay on the majority of adaptation studies, which involve book to film retellings. Few scholars have traced my subject, the novel to musical adaptation. Thus, I choose to employ structural and cultural forms of criticism in addition to analyzing the adaptation industry as I look through the transition from novel to musical.

"Strange New Music": Looking at Ragtime

Ragtime is a story of stories. In adapting the novel to the musical, certain stories gain importance and focus, while others fade offstage.

The 1975 novel by E.L. Doctorow weaves together fictional and historical characters in early twentieth century New York. The historical characters include entertainer Evelyn Nesbit, magician Harry Houdini, businessman J. P. Morgan, entrepreneur Henry Ford, radical activist Emma Goldman, and African American civil rights leader Booker T. Washington. The main fictional characters are made up of three families: a well-to-do white family living in New Rochelle, an African American couple and their newborn baby, and a Jewish immigrant father and daughter. Every character in Doctorow's novel gets equal representation, as the omniscient narrator shifts to every character's perspective. The fictional and historical characters interact throughout the novel so seamlessly that it is easy to forget the fictional characters were not real people. By the novel's close, it is clear that Doctorow weaves together a complex narrative that gives an overarching view of modern age America.

Doctorow's novel had its share of critical and commercial success. According to researcher Douglas Strassler, *Ragtime* was the novel that catapulted Doctorow into the

literary spotlight: “Although it was his earlier book, *The Book of Daniel*, that garnered E. L. Doctorow his first critical recognition, it was not until three years later that he experienced major success with 1975's *Ragtime*.” The book was a bestseller, even becoming “the year's top-selling novel” (Strassler). While the book was immensely popular at the time of its publication, critical reception was not unanimous. Many found fault with Doctorow’s blend of history and fiction, one critic even saying that Doctorow “grasps arbitrarily and wildly at public facts and events” (Strassler). Other critics enjoyed Doctorow lyrical prose, intriguing characters, deft handling of a complex plot. Or, as George Stade wrote in the *New York Times Book Review,* “The outrageous, the hyperbolic, the impossible - these are the elements from which Doctorow fashions a coherence so factitious and arbitrary it no longer distorts, but attains a purity and comic integrity of its own” (Strassler). Strassler concludes that despite all the differing opinions surrounding the book, *Ragtime “*enjoyed its moment in the literary hotseat during its 1975 publication,” having both critical and commercial success.

In adapting *Ragtime*, the musical’s writers had the challenge of bringing the intricate plot and historical events to the stage in a musical form. The end result is that the musical simplifies the historical characters and amplifies the fictional characters. Instead of the novel’s seamless fusion of fiction and history, the musical focuses on the fictional characters with a historical backdrop of secondary characters. This can be seen in the 2009 Broadway revival’s interpretation of the musical, which had the three main families and their respective ensembles on center stage, with the historical characters framing them in the balcony seats and on high platforms above them. Two characters I will be focusing on in the switch from novel to musical are Houdini and Sarah. In the

musical, Houdini's character diminishes and Sarah's character strengthens, while in the novel both characters are given equal emphasis.

In Doctorow's novel, Houdini, like many of the other historical figures in *Ragtime*, has many passages told from his perspective. He even dominates most of Chapter 27, as the novel turns from Sarah's funeral (described in the previous chapter) to the death of Houdini's mother. The change ties fiction and fact together, as both Coalhouse Walker, Jr., Sarah's fiancée, and Houdini grieve over their loved ones. In the novel, Doctorow describes Houdini grieving in great detail:

> His mother had been dead for some months but every morning he awoke with his wound as fresh and painful as if she had died the night before. He had canceled several bookings. He shaved only when he remembered to, which was not often, and with his reddened eyes and stubble and baggy suit he looked like anything but the snappy magician of international fame. (197-198)

The chapter continues to describe Houdini's feelings about his mother's death, and his tireless search to discredit clairvoyants as he himself wants some communication with her from the other side, and the progress of his career. In Doctorow's novel, Houdini is a strongly etched character, a conflicted man who manages the art and business of his career while yearning to speak to his mother once more. In contrast, the musical adaptation reduces his presence in a few songs and some dialogue. Houdini's character gets further diminished in the 2009 revival, as one of his solos was cut in the production. As a result, Houdini becomes a caricature of an entertainer in the musical.

Meanwhile, Sarah's change is a reversal from her presentation in Doctorow's

novel to the musical. In the novel, Sarah "had a child's face, a guileless brown beautiful face" (Doctorow 70). She does not have much written from her point of view, as the courtship between her and Coalhouse Walker, Jr. is seen from Mother's family's perspective. Later in the novel, Doctorow writes, "Nobody knew Sarah's last name or thought to ask. Where had she been born, and where had she lived, this impoverished uneducated black girl with such absolute conviction of the way human beings ought to conduct her lives?" (187) While this thought was from the family's perspective, Doctorow makes no effort to answer the question. Sarah is simply "a girl of perhaps eighteen or nineteen years" an innocent girl with "no guile" (187-188). When Coalhouse tells her that he will not marry her until he has his car restored, she believes that trying to meet the president in person would be a feasible way to set things right. Doctorow's descriptions of Sarah make her to be a girl, weakened by her innocence.

Ragtime the musical paints Sarah in a different light. Sarah is still a young African American woman who is plagued by racism. In the novel and the musical, she goes to meet the president and is brutally attacked by the police. But the musical adds something powerful to Sarah, in the form of a solo where she can express all of her emotions from attempting to kill her son. The novel does not explore the complex idea of Sarah murderous attempt, and why she did it. In the song "Your Daddy's Son," Sarah tells her baby all about the romance she had with Coalhouse, and the fact that he does not know about the baby. In the bridge of the song—and the climax of the song's emotion—she talks of her attempt to end her son's life:

Couldn't hear no music,

Couldn't see no light.

Mama, she was frightened,

Crazy from the fright.

Tears without no comfort,

Screams without no sound.

Only darkness and pain,

The anger and pain,

The blood and the pain!

I buried my heart in the ground!

In the ground-

When I buried you in the ground.

After the bridge, Sarah returns to the original rhythm and melody of the song's first verses, save for one moment, when she interrupts the refrain "You had your daddy's hands" with a higher pitched "Forgive me." This moment in the song shows a turning point in Sarah, as she wants forgiveness for trying to kill her own son. In "Your Daddy's Son," Sarah is given a powerful moment in the musical to think about her actions, and accept her son into her life. A moment that never happened in Doctorow's novel.

A happier time for Sarah and Coalhouse. (Left, Original Broadway Production: Audra MacDonald as Sarah and Brian Stokes Mitchell as Coalhouse Walker, Jr., Right Broadway Revival: Stephanie Umoh as Sarah and Quentin Earl Darrington as Coalhouse Walker, Jr.)

"You've got to pick-a-pocket or two": Making Oliver!

Before Charles Dickens' classic *Oliver Twist* became a novel, it was first published as a serial from February 1837 to April 1839. *Oliver Twist* follows the story of orphan Oliver. He lives in a workhouse for the poor, where he is neglected and not fed well. After inadvertently starting a riot in the workhouse for wanting "some more" gruel, he becomes apprenticed by an equally neglectful undertaker and runs away to London. There, he becomes part of a gang of children who pick pockets for a living under the care of their leader, a Jewish criminal named Fagin. After a series of events that involve Nancy, a prostitute who used to steal for Fagin when she was younger, Bill Sikes, Nancy's abusive lover, and Fagin himself, *Oliver Twist ends* happily for its protagonist. A wealthy benefactor takes Oliver in, and Oliver finally has a family.

Though the story of Oliver Twist first originated as a written narrative, one may argue that *Oliver Twist* was a tale meant to be told in a performance medium. According to David Perdue, *Oliver Twist* is "[o]ne of the most dramatized of Dickens' works," "appearing in 10 theaters in London before the serialization of the novel was even completed" (Oliver Twist). Dickens' writing also lends itself to the theatrical, as Perdue writes that a "close association with the theater had an important impact on Dickens the author. Theatrical characters abound in the novels and the stories are told in such a visual way that they easily lent themselves first to illustrations in the novels, stage dramatizations, and finally to film" (Dickens on Stage). Dickens' visual theatricality can be seen in the scene where Fagin is first described:

In a frying-pan which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over

them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shriveled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare, and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and a clothes-horse: over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging (Chapter 8).

Dickens sets up the scene with many details, bringing to light many elements that are already stage-worthy. The "mantelshelf" and the "clothes-horse" where the silk handkerchiefs were hanging? Set elements. The "greasy flannel gown" and "matted red hair"? A job for the costume designer. And the actor who could play Fagin already has clues into the character work, from his old age, his "shriveled" body, and a "villainous-looking face." Dickens himself was a part of the theatre. An amateur actor, Dickens often directed, stage managed, and oversaw his own theatricals. Such experience eventually led to him reading from his own novels: "In 1853 Dickens began giving public readings of his works, first for charity, and beginning in 1858, for profit. Before this time no great author had performed their works in public" (Perdue, Dickens on Stage). Thus, *Oliver Twist* was all too ready to be adapted into a stage musical in 1960. *Oliver!* with music, book, and lyrics all by Lionel Bart, has all of the main plot elements of the novel. However, one important change in *Oliver!* begs the following question: is Oliver really the main character of his own musical? One would think that with the show named after him, he would have a significant number of scenes, musical numbers, and solos. This is not true in the musical. Though Oliver sings throughout the

production, he only has one solo, “Where Is Love,” in the entire show. In comparison, Fagin and Nancy have many more numbers in which they star: Nancy leads the chorus in “It’s a Fine Life” and “Oom-Pah-Pah,” is featured in “I’ll Do Anything,” and has her own torch song, “As Long as He Needs Me,” which she reprises later in the musical. Fagin also has many numbers, from “You’ve Got to Pick a Pocket or Two” to his comic solo “Reviewing the Situation.” The adult characters, with their abundance of numbers, seem to overshadow young Oliver in the musical.

One can look to the 2009 West End revival of *Oliver!* to see the emphasis placed on characters other than the adorable orphan. As critic David Benedict wrote on the production, “If serious Harry Stott as Oliver is more becalmed it’s because the script offers him even less to do.” Even the publicity for the show centered on the characters of Nancy and Fagin. First, a reality show about casting the revival’s leads, *I’ll Do Anything For You*, focused on casting not only Oliver, but Nancy as well. Moreover, the celebrity getting top billing was comic actor Rowan Atkinson, who played Fagin in the production. With so much buzz around the actors playing Nancy and Fagin in the 2009 West End revival, Oliver himself faded in the background.

Perhaps, the musical is actually about another character: Fagin, the criminal leader of his gang of pick pocketing boys. After all, the musical ends with him, as he sings a reprise of “Reviewing the Situation.” As Lionel Bart wrote in the libretto:

(Emerging from under the bridge recess—HE sings)
Can somebody change? It's possible.
Maybe it's strange but it's possible.

All my dearest companions and treasures,

I've left 'em behind.

I'll turn a leaf over,

And who can tell what I may find?

(Alone and friendless, FAGIN walks over the bridge off into the

dawn, as a slow reprise of HIS refrain is played).

Fagin, then, has had some change in his character, unlike the consistently adorable Oliver. In singing "Reviewing the Situation," Fagin is "reviewing" and reflecting on his life. He is in a questioning state, wondering if someone can change, and finding it to be possible. Though Fagin is alone and friendless he is walking "into the dawn," and offering him redemption. This hopeful ending is a far cry from Dickens' novel; while the musical gives Fagin life, Dickens' novel has him arrested and awaiting execution. Fagin's redemption at the end *Oliver!* turns him from a "villainous-looking and repulsive" criminal into a man with a second chance. Despite its exclamatory title, the musical *Oliver!* emphasizes other characters besides the hapless titular orphan.

"I have been changed for good": Wicked

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West was written by Gregory Maguire. Published in 1995, *Wicked* retells the story of *The Wizard of Oz* (a story with its own book to film progression) from the villain's point of view: the Wicked Witch of the West, now christened Elphaba.[2] The novel creates a whole new fantasy world of Oz, with some familiar places (The Emerald City and Munchkinland) and new ones (The Vinkus, a renaming of Baum's "Winkie Country"). Maguire also writes for an older audience, while Baum's books which were aimed for children. *Wicked* has dark

imagery, violence, and even has a close look into Elphaba's love life. Moreover, Maguire's narrative delves into larger themes than a desire for ruby slippers. In *Wicked*, prejudices (against Elphaba's green skin is one of them), political and social injustice, and the true nature of good and evil are some of the themes explored. As a review of the novel in *Publishers Weekly* states: "Maguire combines puckish humor and bracing pessimism in this fantastical meditation on good and evil, God and free will, which should, despite being far removed in spirit from the Baum books, captivate devotees of fantasy" (Fiction Review). Also, the book has an air of tragedy to it, as Elphaba has the same end as Baum's Wicked Witch: dying from Dorothy's thrown bucket of water. Maguire's novel gives The Wicked Witch many things. First, he gives her a name, which makes her a person with an identity more than simply a "witch." Maguire also transforms a simple stock villain into a complex character who questions the very nature of good and evil. Also, *Wicked* is a narrative sympathetic with Elphaba. The Wicked Witch is no villain in the novel; instead, the real baddie is the Wizard of Oz, now a totalitarian dictator. Finally, Maguire writes Elphaba's death not as the vanquishing of a villain, but a tragic end.

The musical adaptation of *Wicked* makes Elphaba an even more sympathetic character. Focusing on Elphaba's time at Shiz University and her transformation into the Wicked Witch of the West, Elphaba becomes a young woman who feels like an outsider because of her green skin. The dramatic genre has also changed; instead of a tragedy, the musical is a drama with comedic elements. While the musical's Elphaba faces the same prejudices and sociopolitical conflicts, those conflicts are resolved very differently from Maguire's tragic conclusion.

First off, Elphaba, despite her moniker "the Witch," is not particularly magical in Maguire's novel. At Shiz, Elphaba specializes in life sciences, while Glinda chooses sorcery as her major, under Madame Morrible's encouragement (Maguire 176, 91-92). Elphaba's feelings toward magic are largely dismissive during her Shiz years: "Spells, changings, apparitions? It's all entertainment,' said Elphaba. 'It's theatre… I think sorcery is trivial.'" (137-138). Elphaba does pursue sorcery, but it her magical development takes place later in her adulthood. The musical, on the other hand, repaints Elphaba as a young woman with great magical ability at the start. In the musical, Madame Morrible encourages Elphaba, not Glinda, to study magic:

Oh, Miss Elphaba:
Many years I have waited
For a gift like yours to appear…
With a talent like yours, dear
There is a defin-ish chance
If you work as you should
You'll be making good.

Without being established as magical at the beginning, Elphaba's position in the novel is more complex. During her Shiz years, Elphaba is more interested in science and political activism, and her relationship with magic is not established until later on in the novel. Meanwhile, in the musical, Elphaba's early onset of a magical ability puts her into the position as the young heroine with a great gift.

As mentioned previously, the novel and musical versions of *Wicked* have two different genres: the novel is a tragedy, while the musical is a drama with comedic

elements. Within these two genres, the portrayal of Elphaba's character is defined differently. In Maguire's novel, Elphaba is the tragic hero, fated to her demise: "*Wicked* is an epic story, built along the lines of a Shakespearean or Greek tragedy, in which the seeds of Elphaba's destiny are all sown early in the novel" (Maguire 408). With her green skin and rebellious political leanings, Elphaba is a character consistently at odds with her world. She fights to endure until the very end of the novel:

> She would emerge. She always had before. The punishing political climate of Oz had beat her down, dried her up, tossed her away—like a seedling she had drifted, apparently too desiccated ever to take root. But surely the curse was on the land of Oz, not on her. Though Oz had given her a twisted life, hadn't it also made her capable? (Maguire 4)

Still, by the book's close, there is no more hope for Elphaba. Her lover Fiyero is dead, her family still estranged from her, and her final desire is never fulfilled, as she dies without ever getting the ruby slippers from Dorothy. Maguire ends *Wicked* with an epilogue that reveals the end of the other characters, and he has this to say of Elphaba:

> And of the Witch? In the life of a Witch, there is no *after*, in the *ever after* of a Witch, there is no *happily*; in the story of a Witch, there is no afterword. Of that part that is the life story, beyond the story of the life, there is—alas, or perhaps thank mercy—no telling. She was dead, dead and gone, and all that was left of her was the carapace of her reputation for malice. (406)

Elphaba, for all her fighting, is "dead and gone" at the close of Maguire's novel, with nothing left behind but an evil reputation.

The musical of *Wicked*, however, is another matter entirely with respect to Elphaba's character. Like Fagin, who suffers a less-than-glorious death in *Oliver Twist* but survives in the musical adaptation, Elphaba dies at the hands of a little girl in Maguire's novel but lives in the musical. While Maguire's Elphaba does have an aversion to water, Elphaba of the musical has no such aversion. She escapes under a trap door, with the rest of Oz thinking she is dead. Also, Elphaba gets another benefit that *Oliver!*'s Fagin does not have: Elphaba does not exit "alone and friendless." Instead, Elphaba escapes with Fiyero, who becomes the Scarecrow[3]. Thus, the story of Elphaba in the musical adaptation of *Wicked* does get a happy ending.

Ultimately, however, the major difference between *Wicked* the novel and *Wicked* the musical is the themes each work poses first. While Maguire's novel is a treatise of the nature of good and evil, the musical adaptation of *Wicked* emphasizes the friendship between Glinda and Elphaba. In the novel, Glinda and Elphaba's friendship is there, but understated. During one scene, Glinda convinces Elphaba to try a hat on, with the intent to make fun of her later:

> Galinda expected to have to bite the inside of her lip to keep from laughing… But Elphaba dropped the whole sugary plate onto her strange pointed head, and looked at Galinda 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…
>
> "Entrancing," she said. 'There's some strange exotic quality of beauty about you. I never thought."
>
> "Surprise," said Elphaba, and nearly blushed, if darker green

constituted a blush—"I mean, *surprise*, not beauty. It's just surprise… It's not beauty."

"Who am I to argue," said Galinda, tossing her curls and striking a pose, and Elphaba actually laughed at that, and Galinda laughed back, partly horrified as she did so. (Maguire 78-79)

Later, Glinda thinks, "So Elphaba, no longer a social liability, had all the potential of becoming an actual friend." (Maguire 134). Just before Elphaba parts with Glinda for a long time, Glinda thinks, "how I have changed… From despising the colored girl to claiming we are blood!" (177) In Maguire's novel, Glinda and Elphaba grudgingly become friends.

Yet their last conversation in the novel is not a happy one. Glinda and Elphaba are unable to make peace after Glinda gives Dorothy the ruby slippers:

They stood glaring at each other. They had too much common history to come apart over a pair of shoes, yet the shoes were planted between them, a grotesque icon of their differences. Neither one could retreat, or move forward. It was silly, and they were stuck, and someone needed to break the spell. But all the Witch could do was insist, "I want those *shoes*." (348)

Despite their friendship, Glinda and Elphaba cannot resolve their differences by the end of Maguire's novel.

The musical gives a different interpretation of Glinda and Elphaba's friendship. In the musical, the song "Popular" resembles Maguire's bonnet scene, but the scene becomes an up-tempo, humorous solo for Glinda as she attempts to give sullen Elphaba a

makeover. While Glinda in the novel never supports Elphaba's political ambitions, she considers it for a moment in the musical during the song "Defying Gravity:"

ELPHABA

Together we'll be the greatest team

There's ever been, Glinda

Dreams, the way we planned 'em

GLINDA

If we work in tandem

BOTH

There's no fight we cannot win

Just you and I

Defying gravity

Their last time together in the musical is a far cry from the tense reunion in Maguire's novel. While they still have their differences, they sing a touching ballad to each other, saying, "Who can say if I've been changed for the better?/ But because I knew you/ I have been changed for good." Their final parting in "For Good" is more sentimental and heartbreaking, as they recognize the strength of their friendship.

In *Wicked* the musical, Elphaba is a magically talented, though misunderstood, heroine. She still fights the Oz political machine, but instead of dying as a maligned villain, she lives and escapes with her love. The musical's Elphaba is also more emotionally grounded, as she is able to sustain a friendship with Glinda, both women changing each other "for good."

Even wicked witches like hair accessories. Idina Menzel as Elphaba (left) and

Kristin Chenoweth as Glinda (right) as part of the Original Broadway Cast of Wicked.

"Who Will Buy?": What Makes a Musical Successful – An Economic and Societal Analysis

The previous section analyzed the structural changes that were made when the novels *Ragtime, Oliver Twist,* and *Wicked* were adapted into full-length musicals. Keeping those changes in mind, this section attempts to answer the question: why were these changes made in a societal context? And how successful were these musicals financially?

As mentioned in the structural analysis of *Ragtime*, the musical adaptation emphasized Doctorow's fictional characters at the expense of the historical characters. While the change disrupts the democratic representation Doctorow gave to all of his characters, it provides a more cohesive narrative in the musical format. Because musicals have songs as well as dialogue, there is less time available to create well-rounded, principal characters. And with the many historical and fictional characters in *Ragtime's* world, it would be best to focus on a smaller number of characters to create a more focused, creative work. The result is a more appealing, cohesive drama that is easier to grasp than an intricate plot where every character is complex.

Why choose the fictional characters over the historical characters, then? As illustrated earlier, Houdini was just as complex a character as Sarah, and could have had an opportunity to become a lead in *Ragtime*.[4] Instead, the focus was put on Sarah, as audiences are more readily able to relate to the fictional characters. The fictional characters resemble real people more than historical figures, which often appear to be

larger than life. On the other hand, the struggles of characters like Sarah and Coalhouse are more accessible to audience members.

And the formula seemed to pay off. *Ragtime* the musical premiered on Broadway on January 18, 1998. It had a book by Terrence McNally, music by Stephen Flaherty, and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens. The lavish production, including a working Model T automobile, also featured Broadway stars Marin Mazzie as Mother, Brian Stokes Mitchell as Coalhouse Walker, Jr., and Audra McDonald as Sarah. Audra McDonald won the Best Featured Actress Tony Award for her performance, and the musical also received Tony Awards for Best Book and Best Original Score. Running for a total of 834 performances, *Ragtime* closed on January 16, 2000. The award-winning musical also had a 2009 Broadway revival featuring Christiane Noll as Mother and Bobby Steggert as Mother's Younger Brother. With a long first Broadway run and multiple Tony Award wins, *Ragtime* became a critical and commercial success.

Like *Ragtime*, *Oliver!* has achieved large levels of commercial success. The musical is beloved in England, with the musical being revived three times in the West End, London's equivalent of Broadway. The most recent revival premiered in the West End on January 14, 2009 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. It starred Rowan Atkinson as Fagin, Jodie Prenger as Nancy, and a rotating cast (Laurence Jeffcoate, Harry Stott, and Gwion Wyn Jones) as Oliver; and the production closed on January 8, 2011.

The Broadway transfers of *Oliver!* are not as cut and dry. The Broadway premiere of *Oliver!* was a success, premiering on January 6, 1963 and closing on November 14, 1964 after a total 774 performances. A revival was produced soon after, opening in 1965 and running for sixty-four performances. The 1984 Broadway revival,

on the other hand, was another story. A transfer of the 1983 London revival and starring Ron Moody as Fagin and Patti LuPone as Nancy, this production of *Oliver!* only ran for seventeen performances.

Why didn't American audiences respond as positively to the 1984 Broadway revival as to the original 1963 production? Since the 1984 revival there have not been any new Broadway revivals of *Oliver!*, while the West End has seen two additional successful revivals. One possible answer to this question is that American audiences are not comfortable with the possibility of anti-Semitism in Fagin's character. Let us return to the scene where Dickens first describes Fagin. He is a character with many contradictions. Though his face is "villainous-looking," he grins upon meeting Oliver and acts as host, offering him sausages and a handshake. He calls Oliver and the other boys "my dears," but threatens Oliver with his life when the boy sees Fagin's hidden treasure. Fagin is an imaginative and complex character, but Dickens refers to him constantly as "the Jew" rather than his name.

Though Fagin is a representation of the anti-Semitism of Victorian England, he has also been sanitized through the musical adaptation. Fagin is now a comic relief figure who entertains audiences with his funny solo songs. He is not condemned to die as a thieving Jew, as in the novel, but is able to live at the show's close with a new perspective on life. So, while Fagin is no longer the controversial, anti-Semitic villain in *Oliver!* that he was in Dickens' novel, his reputation from the novel could still negatively influence audiences, therefore influencing the limited legacy of *Oliver!* on Broadway.

The logo for the 2009 London revival of Oliver! Would American audiences be offended by Fagin's hook-shaped "L" for a nose?

Wicked has attained great levels of success in the eight years since it premiered on Broadway. Both the 2003 Broadway and 2006 West End productions are still running, and the Broadway production often breaks earnings records and performs to capacity crowds. The Broadway production also won three Tony Awards, including a Best Actress win for Idina Menzel, who originally played Elphaba.

The musical's success is so great that it can be difficult remembering that Maguire's novel was also a great commercial success. Why then were so many changes made to the musical's storyline? A possible answer is the commercial and societal strength of the musical's theme of friendship between Elphaba and Glinda. While the original cover design of Maguire's *Wicked* featured the Witch in the center, the musical's logo is of Glinda whispering a secret to a smirking Elphaba.

A solitary tragic hero or a friend with a secret? The cover design of Gregory Maguire's novel and promotional poster for the Broadway production.

The musical's emphasis on Elphaba's and Glinda's friendship is a heartfelt, positive spin on the Oz mythos that audiences have responded to enthusiastically.

Curtain Call: A Conclusion

What happens when a novel gets adapted into a musical? Dialogue is written, music is composed, and storylines and characters are changed to make a new, dramatic work. This paper analyzed three adaptations: *Ragtime, Oliver!* and *Wicked.* All three musicals differed structurally from their narrative counterparts. E.L. Doctorow's balanced combination of history and fiction in *Ragtime* morphed into a more focused emphasis on the fictional characters in the musical. *Oliver Twist* the story about a little

And *Wicked*, a tragic and sympathetic rendering of a former villain developed into a more orphan who could, became a musical that spent more time on the grownups' adventures. joyful adventure that celebrated the friendship of two witches. Their structural differences lead to various measures of success, with mixed levels of critical acclaim, awards, and financial merit, in some part owing to their structural forms, as well as their societal value.

Endnotes:

1. *The Black Crook* is considered one of the first pieces of musical theatre. As noted in the Encyclopedia Britannica, it included "French Romantic ballet and German melodrama." With a book by Charles M. Barras, lyrics by Theodore Kennick, and music by Thomas Baker, Giuseppe Operti, and George Bickwell, *The Black Crook* opened on September 12, 1866 in New York City.
2. Interestingly enough, Gregory Maguire named Elphaba after the author of the original *Wizard of Oz* stories: "Maguire fashioned the name of Elphaba (pronounced EL-fa-ba) from the initials of the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, Lyman Frank Baum—L-F-B—Elphaba (407).
3. In Maguire's novel, Elphaba imagines that Fiyero could be the scarecrow, but Maguire later writes: "There was nothing but straw and air inside the Scarecrow's clothes. No hidden lover returning, no last hope of salvation" (392).
4. It looks like Houdini will get his musical moment in the spotlight. A new musical

called *Houdini* is in the works, with "Danny Elfman (Music), David Yazbek (Lyrics), Kurt Andersen (Book), and Jack O'Brien (Director)" all attached to the project (Blank).

Works Cited

Benedict, David. "Oliver!" *Variety.com*. 15 Jan 2009. Web. 16 May 2011. <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117939340?refCatId=33>.

Blank, Matthew. "Schedule of Upcoming Broadway Shows." *Playbill*. 15 May 2011. Web. 26 May 2011. <http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/80060-Schedule-of-Upcoming-Broadway-Shows>.

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. 1838.

Doctorow, E. L. *Ragtime*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007. Print.

"Fiction Review: Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West by Gregory Maguire / Author, Douglas Smith / Illustrator William Morrow & Company $26.99 (416p) ISBN 978-0-06-039144-7." *Book Reviews, Bestselling Books & Publishing Business News | Publishers Weekly*. Publishers Weekly, 30 Oct. 1995. Web. 12 May 2011. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-06-039144-7>.

Maguire, Gregory. *Wicked: the Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995. Print.

Murray, Simone. "Materializing adaptation theory: the adaptation industry." *Literature-Film Quarterly* 36. 1 (2008): 4+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 21 Mar. 2011.

"Musical." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011. Web. 31 Mar. 2011. <http://www. britannica. com/EBchecked/topic/399126/musical>.

Perdue, David. "Dickens on Stage." *David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page*. Web. 3 May 2011. <http://charlesdickenspage.com/stage.html>.

Perdue, David. "Oliver Twist." *David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page*. Web. 3 May 2011. <http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/twist.html>.

Strassler, Douglas. "Contemporary Reception: Ragtime. " *20th-Century American Bestsellers*. Graduate School of Library and Information, University of Illinois, Urbana-ChampaignScience, 2006. Web. 28 Apr. 2011. <http://www3. isrl. illinois. edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/ search. cgi?title=Ragtime>.

Wolf, Stacy. *A Problem like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*. The University of Michigan Press. 2002. Print.