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# Understanding the Wicked Witch:

Exploring how "difference" makes Elphaba an  
inspiration to her audience

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**Abstract:**

The Wicked Witch of the West has changed her reputation in recent pop-culture, from the embodiment of evil in *The Wizard of Oz*, to the quirky and confident Elphaba in *Wicked*. This thesis aims to explore and explain why Elphaba's different and unique personality is an important inspiration for young women and queer people today while looking through the lens of theatre and queer history. Elphaba is one of the main characters in *Wicked*, but to get the complete understanding of Elphaba, this thesis will look at key moments in act one where Elphaba is both alone and interacts with other key characters, such as Glinda, and explain how the interactions, both story-wise and through theatre concepts, amplify and describe Elphaba's "difference". By looking closer at the script, as well as study the works of the scholars Boyd, Schrader and Wolf, the thesis will show light on how Elphaba's character represents "difference" in the musical. This will shed light on how difference comes in many different forms and will show that having a character behave different is a key element of *Wicked's* success, particularly as a musical. Ultimately Elphaba inspires the audience to defy social norms and embrace their uniqueness.

## Introduction – Why the Wicked Witch of the West?

“GOOD NEWS! SHE’S DEAD! THE WITCH OF THE WEST IS DEAD!” (Schwartz and Holzman 2) In the opening number of *Wicked*, we hear these words sung in all its glory. The Wicked Witch of the West is dead, and her death gets celebrated as her reign of terror is over. But is that really what happened? *Wicked* takes its narrative from the idea that the Wicked Witch of the West was not wicked at all, but an independent young woman who stood up for what she believed in. Elphaba gets an opportunity to show her side of the story, and she proves that she was not, truly, wicked.

In this thesis, I plan to explore Elphaba’s difference and uniqueness through key moments in the musical and argue that she is an inspiration to young women and queer people. In this context, difference and uniqueness refers to anything outside the norm, like appearance, personality, goals, and behavior, very much like the classical witch stereotype. I think it is important to explore this type of character, as characters like her are rarely portrayed like protagonists in media. Strong female characters are often referred to as witches, as a derogatory term, in hopes of framing them as evil and not worth pursuing. Elphaba is very much still a witch, in the most literal sense, but she uses this to her advantage, and creates her own story in *Wicked*. Elphaba is the musical’s symbol of being different, not only because of her green skin and magical powers, but her confident and strong personality and goals. Having a character like Elphaba is important to show that being different is good and lead to great things.

So, why write about the musical and not the book? This is a literature thesis after all. The answer ties in with the very point that I try to make about Elphaba; it is something different. McMillin says it best; “The answer is that simpler pleasures are not what one goes to the theatre for in the first place. One goes looking for something other than totalizing systems of omniscience, something related to the strange business of watching people pretend to be other people and engage in made-up stories for hours at a time.” (179) Theatre and musicals themselves are different from our everyday life. It is a weird mirroring of people, and expresses stories with a political or social message. Just like Elphaba’s character, it is very much in the musical’s core mechanics to embrace the different and unexpected.

### **The trial – Who defends the Wicked Witch?**

To get an understanding of why Elphaba's difference matters, I want to look at her musicality and voice in the musical. This is also a key issue for scholars interested in Elphaba's character. For example, Michelle Boyd argues in her article "Alto on a Broomstick: Voicing the Witch in the Musical *Wicked*" (2010) that Elphaba is the epitome of different, not only posing as a norm-threatening witch, but also subverting the expectations that the audience might have of a witch. She does so by explaining the musicality and voice of Elphaba. In particular, she states that Elphaba's character has previous iterations of the Wicked Witch of the West and villains from other musical productions embedded in her characterization, but uses music and song as a tool to speak the same language as the other characters. To understand why the musicality matters for Elphaba, I want to take a quick look at the history of the witch in media.

Boyd explains that the concept of "the witch" has shifted and turned throughout the years, from the Salem Witch trials, and the evil witches in stories and fairytales, to the modern alternative icon like Sabrina and the Blair Witch project. The history of the witch going from a villain and something to fear, to a role model for rebels and a feminist icon, ties into Elphaba and her story in *Wicked*. Boyd argues: "since the 2003 opening of the hit musical *Wicked*, though, even the infamous Wicked Witch of the West has undergone an image overhaul, joining the ranks of Samantha and Sabrina to become the new star of a generation of loveable witches who use their magic for girl power rather than mayhem." (98). I think the point she makes about the shift the witch has made from pure evil and lover of mayhem to lovable creature and feminist icon has a lot of value, as it explains how a character like Elphaba can work as a symbol for difference. The audience already has prior knowledge to what a witch is, if it is from old fairytales or stories, from the "Wizard of Oz", or other media. The witch is supposed to be a woman with immense power that she uses for evil. If the audience did not have this knowledge, then they would not care about the plot of Elphaba being seen as an evil force. The same can be said if the audience did not have knowledge of the new age witch.

Boyd also points to the importance of singing and musicality in the performance of Elphaba. She says: "Singing humanizes her and endows her with a voice to rage back against her oppressive world. Yet, while Elphaba denies her "wicked" label, she embraces her witch ancestry, and classic "wicked witch" mannerisms infuse her vocal performance" (99). According to Boyd, Elphaba becomes more humanized through her singing, giving her a voice that is equal to the other characters, through the logic of the musical genre. By giving her the same language as the other characters gives her the power to break free from the "wickedness" that is bestowed upon her, but at the same time have her have a voice that is reminiscent of her roots, and foreshadows her demise in the end. By incorporating both factors, Elphaba becomes a unique character in the story, both as the heroine and the villain.

While Boyd discusses in detail Elphaba's difference while focusing fully on Elphaba, to fully understand the symbolic power of Elphaba's difference it is necessary to focus on the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda in the musical. For Elphaba to represent difference, we must see her in context of her interactions with Glinda, who represents the norm, and focus on the relationship they have. One key scholar who discusses this possible reading is Valerie Lynn Schrader. In her article "Friends "For Good" Wicked: A New Musical and the Idealization of Friendship" (2013), she brings light to how the strong friendship between Glinda and Elphaba both changed them for good, and how the difference between them is what made the friendship work. I believe that getting insight into how Elphaba and Glinda function as a friendship, we unlock more of Elphaba's character than just looking at her alone. Elphaba cannot be different if there is no one else to be different from.

Schrader argues that the musical is giving us a lesson on the importance of friendship for those who might feel different, and that the significance of the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda is purely platonic. Her article frames the importance of friendship through Elphaba's journey in the musical and reads Elphaba as an interesting character through her friendship with Glinda. Schrader does not discuss Elphaba as a stand-alone character, but she analyses her through her friendship with Glinda in key moments of the musical. She states, "By doing so, this article suggests that *Wicked* delivers an important message to theatre-goers: Friendship is something to be valued

and cherished.” (8). As theatre is an artform that includes important messages about the real world, I think Schrader is right about suggesting that *Wicked* gives the audience important lessons about friendship and belonging. Being different should not be a hindrance for finding friendship, and I think *Wicked* portrays this beautifully with Elphaba and Glinda. Friendships might form in the most peculiar of places, as Schrader further explains in her article.

The most important moment Schrader explores is the “Ozdust Ballroom” scene halfway through Act One. Despite the musical starting with Elphaba and Glinda loathing each other because of their differences, like Elphaba being independent and rough and Glinda being popular and mean, they act selfless and jeopardizes their status-quo for each other. Elphaba realizes that Glinda has shown kindness to Nessarose, providing her a date to the ball, and convinces headmistress Madame Morrible that Glinda should join their private magic lessons, thereby fulfilling Glinda’s dream. When Glinda realizes that Elphaba acted selfless, she instantly regrets ridiculing Elphaba at the ball, and jeopardizes her popularity by joining Elphaba alone on the dancefloor. This is the start of their friendship, argues Schrader, as Glinda and the rest of the students at Shiz accepts Elphaba for who she is. She remarks; “Defiantly, Elphaba begins to dance by herself, looking rather silly and uncoordinated. Galinda, knowing what she must do, joins Elphaba in her silly dance and risks her own popularity in doing so. Gradually, the other students join in, symbolically representing Elphaba’s acceptance by her peers. Most importantly, this odd twist of events positions the two young women as friends. Unlikely friendships often arise from unlikely circumstances.” (9). Even though the essay points out the friendship between the two, I think it gives an important context for Elphaba herself. Elphaba has her own expressive style, independent from the other students at Shiz. She is the embodiment of different. In this scene Elphaba realizes that she yet again has been ridiculed by her peers, but she chooses to stand her ground and dance her way. She takes the space she deserves. Glinda, who just got her magic wand because of Elphaba, joins in, telling us a lot about Elphaba and Glinda both. They are both so different, yet both filled with compassion. Finally, Elphaba gained a friend who will not judge her for being different.

Another scholar who is key to understanding the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda is Stacy Wolf. Where Schrader argues the importance of friendship, Wolf takes it one step further and argues that their friendship can be seen as queer romantic relationship. In her article ""Defying Gravity": Queer Conventions in the Musical "Wicked"" (2008) she points to the importance of the possible queer relationship between Elphaba and Glinda, and how this relationship portrays Elphaba's difference to everyone around her, especially Glinda. I would argue that seeing the relationship through the lens of queerness is important to Elphaba's difference, and it gives us the opportunity to understand this difference as a symbol for being queer. A key part of the experience when feeling different is the importance of developing friendships. We might therefore argue that reading the relationship between Elphaba and Glinda as platonic is also another key part of the developing narrative of Elphaba in the musical. In other words, a key part of her character and what she represents in terms of difference could be related to reading this relationship.

To understand Wolf's argument, I think it is important to look at the queer history of theatre and Wolf's concept of the "traditional musical theatre formula". Theatre hasn't always been able to be a safe space for queer individuals, despite being very queer-coded, as McMillin describes; "(...) what lies at the heart of the illegitimate theatre itself: it is not the gayness, or not only the gayness; it is the doublecoding and the subversion and the repetition." (181). In *Theatre & Sexuality* (2010), Dolan explains the history of queerness in theatre: "Although gay men and lesbians found community backstage, theatre often perpetrated conservative, normalizing values in front of footlights, forcing queer artists to remain closeted." (7). She expresses how queer people often grouped together to use theatre to express themselves, but that their stories were often prohibited or shut down by the police if they were caught. By forcing actors and playwrights to perform conservative ideas on stage, they had to get creative with their storytelling to tell queer stories in a space that prohibited it. Which leads to the "traditional musical theatre formula". Wolf argues that the "traditional musical theatre formula" consists of a seamless relationship between text/story and musical numbers, a realistic narrative, any sort of commentary of social conventions, and flawed but likable protagonists. The protagonists' relationship is the important tool that brings

the story along, and the ensemble builds the framework that allows the relationship to blossom. *Wicked* is using this formula to subvert expectations by having the two possible romantic leads be women and capitalizes on the audience's knowledge of golden-age musicals to work, like *the Sound of Music* or *My Fair Lady*. Wolf explains: "The spoken text tells the political story of an ethically responsible, individual girl who becomes a scapegoat, while the musical numbers employ the two women as a romantic couple" (8) This is the social comment *Wicked* makes. The idea that an independent and different girl wants to take on the world yet is used as societies scapegoat is a familiar topic in media, as women are often used as scapegoats whenever they try to get up and forth in life. This story is believable and not different to the everyday problems that many face. However, mixing it with the possibility of a queer relationship diverts expectations and creates difference that the audience might not be used to, furthering the idea of difference in Elphaba and the musical as a whole. With this in mind, Wolf's argument of reading Elphaba as queer should be clearer.

The first key point to Elphaba's difference is the common reading of Elphaba's greenness. Wolf argues that Elphaba's green-ness can be seen as being queer. Seeing Elphaba as an insert of race or disability is not necessarily wrong, but Wolf states that the Animals and Nessarose fills those positions instead of Elphaba, making her stand out as something different. The Animals face persecution and is a clear parallel to the persecution of Jews during the Second World War, making them represent race in the show. Nessarose is Elphaba's younger, non-green sister and is wheelchair-bound, making her represent disability. Wolf argues that since these two characters gets treated so different, they cannot represent the same difficulties. "(...); she is solely a unique and special individual, the presumed subject of a of the audience's identification and attachment." (Wolf 11). This points out Elphaba's uniqueness, and the audience's desire to follow her story. Elphaba does not need to represent an entire group of people to be engaging to watch, she is designed to represent the uniqueness of the individual.

The second key point in Wolf's reading of *Wicked* is how the musical numbers portray a queer relationship. This ties in with the "traditional musical theatre formula". She explains in detail how the musical numbers placement impacts the flow of the story, but Wolf's reading of "Defying Gravity" is especially important to understand



Elphaba's uniqueness and drive throughout the musical: "The song's placement at the end of the act reveals how the musical privileges Elphaba's values: her independence, determination, and willingness to anger authority figures (like the Wizard) to do the ethical act." (Wolf 15-16). Here Wolf argues that the final song of Act 1 staples Elphaba's values as a powerful force the rest of the characters must deal with. Here Elphaba realizes that the Wizard is not the role-model she thought he was, and she realizes that her natural talent for magic makes her a bigger threat than he ever will be. She is used to be on her own, and fully accepts that she must continue life this way. However, "Defying Gravity" is, for a moment, a duet with Glinda, who is there by her side when they learn the truth about the Wizard. Wolf points out that Glinda starts the song by singing parts of "The Wizard and I"; "[...] which underlines how well Glinda knows Elphaba's dreams: she sings her music." (Wolf 16). Glinda is now a part of Elphaba's life and is determined to stay by her side no matter what. Elphaba returns this favor by inviting Glinda to join her rebellion and that they can achieve greatness together. She sings "Unlimited, together we're unlimited" (Schwartz and Holzman 70) as to show that together, they are unstoppable. When Glinda refuses, they have a bittersweet farewell, as Elphaba soars to the sky and declares that she is working alone. Elphaba is now the Wicked Witch of the West, and is seen as an enemy, only because she stood up for what she thinks is the right thing to do.

I think this also ties into my thesis, as having Elphaba represent the different and "other" by trusting her own instincts, and to go against authority, is something many young people have had a desire to do, but not done in fear of being seen as rude or out of place. Seeing and hearing Elphaba literally defy gravity as she comes to her own, despite knowing she can never return to her past life, can be quite inspiring for young people coming to their own.

### **Elphaba and her audience – What do the recipients think?**

As the scholars established, Elphaba is a key character to understand the meaning of the musical as her difference, either as a stand-alone character or as a counterpart to Glinda, plays a key role in the theming of *Wicked*. However, a musical can only succeed if the audience can relate to the characters and their story. I would now like to discuss Elphaba in the light of three key scenes where Elphaba's true difference is apparent and explain why this matters for young women and queer individuals. I believe that "The Wizard and I", the "Ozdust-ballroom" scene and "Defying Gravity" are the most important scenes where the richness of Elphaba's difference gets established.

To fully understand why Elphaba's difference matters to the musical, I want to look at the opening number "No One Mourns the Wicked" and Elphaba's introduction, as it creates a contrast between expectations and reality surrounding Elphaba and establishes her difference before her true story is told. The musical starts with the celebration of the Wicked Witch of the West's death and the first thing the audience gets to hear of her is her wickedness and how she deserved to die alone. The staging is expressive and bold, so the audience gets the impression that she was a huge threat to the safety of Oz, and that her death was justified. It is when Glinda appears that the real story begins, and it skips back in time to when they met at Shiz university. "And now, from where the silhouette of the Witch has been, the actual Witch herself appears and runs on. But she is a young, hopeful girl – albeit a green one. This is ELPHABA." (Schwartz and Holzman 8) Up until this point, the script only refers to Elphaba as "THE WITCH". The opening number demonizes Elphaba to a title and not a person. However, when we meet Elphaba for the first time attending Shiz university, her introduction is quite underwhelming compared to the opening number of the musical. "Glinda and all the other students covertly stare at Elphaba. She decides to cut to the chase — ELPHABA What? What are you all looking at? Oh-- do I have something in my teeth? (puts her suitcase down) Alright, fine-- we might as well get this over with: No, I'm not seasick; yes, I've always been green; no, I didn't eat grass as a child...» (Schwartz and Holzman 9). From this interaction alone we can gather that Elphaba is independent and full of wit. She is used to being different and chooses to have an outgoing persona that joke about her difference. After an unexpected parting from her sister, it is also revealed that she

has magical powers, something she has learned to suppress. When the headmistress Madame Morrible discovers this, Elphaba is immediately praised and gets one-on-one magic classes. For the first time she gets positive reinforcement for something different about her, and she is one step closer to achieving her dream, meeting the Wizard.

The first key moment I want to look at is “The Wizard and I”, as this song is a perfect example for exploring Elphaba’s difference through her voice, both figuratively and literally. For the first time in her life, she gets positive reinforcement for her different abilities and gets to express herself through song. Introducing Elphaba’s inner hopes and dreams through song underlines the importance of her difference, as music is used to emphasize important story elements in the play. This song also foreshadows Elphaba’s story, unbeknownst to her, where she for the first time gets to paint herself in a positive light. I think by having Elphaba all alone on stage, singing a powerful song with no one else present, introduces her difference in a symbolic way. By solidifying her voice, “The Wizard and I” establishes Elphaba’s difference as a power. “UNLIMITED MY FUTURE IS UNLIMITED” (Schwartz and Holzman 17) these are the important words that Elphaba sings to herself, becoming a motif throughout the musical, returning in “Defying Gravity” and “For Good”. I would argue that through her voice and song, Elphaba realizes the power she has is unlimited because of her difference. She analyzes herself through her voice and realizes that her magic isn’t a curse, but a power. By no longer suppressing her power she also comes to terms with her own difference and chooses to just be herself without the fear of being judged. This is the beginning of Elphaba’s story-arc: coming to terms with her difference and express it boldly. This ties in with Boyd’s argument of overhauling the Wicked Witch, as Elphaba dreams of using her powers for good and make a change in Oz, and not for selfish or evil reasons. By no longer fearing her difference, she lets the audience know that it is okay to be different and have pride in it.

Boyd also made the argument that by equipping Elphaba with song lets her use the same tools as the rest of the cast, as an attempt to humanize her. While I agree with this statement, I would argue that *Wicked* cleverly give her these same tools to amplify the difference by removing the ensemble from her musical numbers. Musical theatre uses the ensemble to create community and belonging: “[...] the ensemble numbers of a

musical do something that does not happen in legitimate drama. The characters express themselves simultaneously. And the build-up of a number to a simultaneous performance is often a dramatic event in itself.” (McMillin 79) By having Elphaba have her “I want”- song be the first number where there is only one person on stage, gives the audience the impression that she does not belong to the community, but is even more powerful as she can capture the audience’s attention with her voice alone. Being on stage alone is a difficult task for the actor, as there is only one point of focus for the audience to follow. I would argue that giving the actor a hard task with the song underlines the experience of feeling different, as all eyes are always on you. As the other solo numbers feature other actors on stage, it makes it easier for them to shift the focus onto other characters and conceal themselves from the audience, becoming more neutral. However, removing the ensemble to give Elphaba her own distinct voice allows her to explore her own difference as an advantage. By giving Elphaba a strong voice that differs from the voice of the community, Schwartz and Holzman create a difference not only in the wording and language of the characters, but also how they present themselves on stage.

The next key moment I want to focus on is the “Ozdust-ballroom” scene, where Elphaba’s difference is expressed through her body and actions, leading to the essential friendship between Elphaba and Glinda. I think the friendship that formed here is an integral part of Elphaba’s difference, as it shows that people who are different can form meaningful relationships with anyone through kindness without having to change who you are initially. Schrader points out the forming of this friendship in her article and argues that important friendships often form in the most unlikely of conditions. By having Elphaba and Glinda see the true self of the other in a space where individuality isn’t a focus, makes the scene more impactful. This solidifies that the friendship they form is important to the overall story later on, like Schrader says. Even though they loathe each other, Elphaba goes out of her way to let Glinda join Madame Morrible’s personal magic-lessons. The key point here is that despite being wronged by everyone she comes across, Elphaba still gives people the opportunity to redeem themselves and change, because she knows how it is to be “different”, or to be the one on the outside. This is further solidified when Elphaba is tricked by Glinda to wear an ugly pointed hat to

the ball, only to be ridiculed by her classmates. Instead of running away, Elphaba takes a stand and starts to dance on her own, expressing herself through her body, being uncoordinated and wild. This contrasts with the dancing of the ensemble, who dances with grace and coordination while singing. This again underlines how Elphaba is different, by having her clash with the rest of the students, not only in appearance, but in actions as well.

Schrader makes an excellent point about the importance of the friendship, and I fully agree that this elevates Elphaba's sense of self, but I would also like to point out how impactful the movement in this scene is. When Glinda realizes her mistake, she apologizes not through voice, but through body, by joining Elphaba's dance. "Elphaba looks at her. Glinda begins to dance in "Elphaba-style". Elphaba allows her to embarrass herself for a while. But then gradually, the Others pick up the dance too, and it is clear that Elphaba has been accepted. As Elphaba and Glinda dance and the others join them..." (Schwartz and Holzman 38). Just like how the ensemble uses voice to create unison, dance does the same. By having Glinda and the rest of the ensemble move in harmony with Elphaba's movements unites the idea of being different and belonging in the crowd. This scene also amplifies the importance of good deeds and solidifies that actions can be more meaningful than words. By having Glinda join in, risking her popularity, it shows that she is willing to adapt for Elphaba and show that Elphaba is allowed to be different. What I think is important to note here is that both Elphaba and Glinda changes in this scene without abandoning their core personality. Elphaba is still spunky and down to earth, and Glinda is still bubbly and cheerful, but they share a connection now and use each other's difference as a strength for their friendship. This is important because Elphaba has been alone up until this point, and by giving her a friend makes it clear to the audience that Elphaba is valued because of her difference. Being different does not mean unlovable, and that difference is key for a meaningful relationship. Elphaba needs a friend that can love her despite their differences, and vice versa.

The final key scene in terms of difference in Elphaba's narrative is "Defying Gravity", and how the scene surrounding it staples Elphaba's fate to be different, despite having the opportunity to be normal. I would argue that her difference is explored

through her mind here. This is the scene in which she decides that she would rather be different, than live the life that people might expect of her. Elphaba has known her whole life that she is different than others, both through her green skin, and her ambitions and magical powers, always wanting to prove that she belongs in Oz because of this. Her goal was to prove herself to the Wizard and make a change of how Ozians treat others who are different from her. The Wizard, however, proved to be a fraud. He wasn't this all powerful "god", he is a manipulative authority figure that prides in fearmongering and uses everyone that he can to remain in power. Elphaba realizes that this is not something she can stand for, and challenges the Wizard on his views, becoming Oz's scapegoat in the process. I believe that Elphaba's difference is what makes her able to stand up towards the Wizard, as Glinda does not dare to do the same when given the opportunity. Elphaba knows what it is like to be shamed and suppressed, and she makes a stand for what she believes is right. "ELPHABA (a discovery) I'm not. It's the Wizard who should be afraid. Of me." (Schwartz and Holzman 68). This is the moment it clicks for Elphaba and where her morals and goals are tested. She knows that she cannot turn from this point on, and she cannot trust the authority around her. This can be connected to Wolf's article when she explores Elphaba's power over the Wizard. Her independence is what drives her in the moment, and she is no longer scared.

Elphaba must abide to her own rules. "I know -- BUT I DON'T WANT IT -- No -- I CAN'T WANT IT ANYMORE ... SOMETHING HAS CHANGED WITHIN ME SOMETHING IS NOT THE SAME I'M THROUGH WITH PLAYING BY THE RULES OF SOMEONE ELSE'S GAME TOO LATE FOR SECOND GUESSING TOO LATE TO GO BACK TO SLEEP IT'S TIME TO TRUST MY INSTINCTS CLOSE MY EYES AND LEAP" (Schwartz and Holzman 68). Elphaba has the option to return to the Wizard and achieve her goals, but she knows that won't be right. She has lived under the Wizard's regime, without knowing that he is the reason that she is treated differently, because of the morals and values he pushes throughout Oz, and now she is ready to break free. However, she no longer wants to do it alone. She has been changed by her relationship with Glinda, and, for a moment, "Defying Gravity" becomes a duet where both Elphaba and Glinda get to fantasize about their future together. Their minds become one and they sing each other's music, like Wolf proposes. I believe that Elphaba had to make this difficult choice to fulfill her

destiny, and sacrifice everything for the better future for Glinda. This is where she inspires the audience to break free of their own regimes. By representing the individual difference that the audience might feel, as Wolf argues, Elphaba shows what can happen when you no longer want to fit in the societal role that you are forced to be in. You must take difficult choices when you grow into your own power, and Elphaba is a glorious example of this. Her difference guides her to the right decision, knowing that she was always destined to be different. Taking action over one's fate and not abiding to the rules just because someone says so is key to Elphaba's character-arc and what *Wicked* itself wants to tell its audience, especially young women and queer people.

### **Conclusion: Why the “weird girl” deserves a chance.**

This is what I mean when I say Elphaba is an inspiration for young women and queer people. Elphaba reaches a point where her difference triumphs all, and she knows she must do things her way to make sense of her life. But all these points could have come from the book, so then again, why the musical? I think McMillin has the answer: “Actors take on otherness by acting in the first place, then they multiply the otherness by singing and dancing too, and their singing and dancing can be matched by others who share the voice of the musical” (208). In other words, we might say that it is in the art of theatre to portray otherness, that is to say, what is different and what is unique in a person. By studying Elphaba through the lens of theatre, it is clear that difference is a part of her character and story, and coming to terms with this is amplified by the musical genre in general. Having her story portrayed in a theatre setting also makes her story reach an audience that might relate to her: young women and queer people. As established, the history of queer theatre is a turbulent one, but it establishes that many queer people and young women get drawn to be in theatre circles (speaking from experience, my theatre group has 3 men and 12 women) and end up in the audience. Theatre is a space for the lost and different, and having these stories told, like Elphaba's, shows that their voice is worth to be heard. As McMillan argues, “[Theatre] brings what is closeted to the stage in the spirit of performance—one reason why gay spectators are among its ardent followers. But everyone has a closet. This theatre is prepared to open the door and be gleeful with what it finds there.” (McMillin 199). In other words, theatre, and musicals in

particular give inspiration to live life to its fullest and not be afraid of what everyone thinks. If Elphaba can do it, so can you.



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