Imagine Gregory Maguire’s Oz where Shiz is more of a boarding school than a university, where Fiyero is the cool bad boy that G(a)linda falls head over heels for, where Elphaba is not actually allergic to water, where all Elphaba wants to do is be at the right hand of the Wizard, and there is a happy ending for almost everyone. This is the world of Wicked, the hit Broadway musical. Many will hear this after reading the book and be completely taken aback. Those that may have seen the musical reading this are wondering why the obvious is being pointed out as blasphemy. For those who have yet to read the book, they are in for quite a surprise. Though Wicked the Musical and Wicked are as different as night and day, where the musical’s plot is loosely based on the book, many major themes and ideas of the book can still be found in the lyrics, such as in The Wizard’s song, “Wonderful.” Though many people may disregard the musical as having none of the weight that the book has, through examining the lyrics of many of the songs, it can be found that although the musical does not cover as many weighty topics, themes, and general ideas as the book does, that weight is there.

Many of these weighty topics are portrayed in the songs, and whether through analyzing what the text itself is saying or through comparing it to the book, these ideas can be found and argued for. Topics such as general ambiguity, the nature of good and evil, the nature of truth, fate and destiny versus free will, civil rights or equal rights, and even different religions and philosophies are touched upon at the very least, if not discussed thoroughly throughout the lyrics of the musical.

“Wonderful”
To start off, of all of the songs in the musical, “Wonderful” does the best job of promoting several different themes found throughout the book such as absolute truth versus public truth, general ambiguity, and the nature of good and evil.

The song begins with the Wizard telling his tale of how he ended up as the Wizard of Oz. He claims that he merely ‘showed up’ in Oz and was immediately revered by the general populace and placed into a position of power: “I never asked for this/ Or planned it in advance/ I was merely blown here by the winds of chance . . . Then suddenly I’m here/ Respected – worshipped, even/ Just because the folks in Oz/ Needed someone to believe in . . . Wonderful/ They called me ‘Wonderful’/ So I said ‘Wonderful’ – if you insist.” (Schwartz). According to L. Frank Baum’s novel, this is exactly what happens; he gets whisked away from Kansas by his weather balloon to the Land of Oz where the general populace immediately accepted him as their new leader. However, in the novel it appears that he traveled around Oz for a bit before claiming his position as The Wizard. This is seen when he was disguising himself as a traveling salesman and seduced Melena, resulting in the conception of Elphaba, and when he left the Grimmerie at Kiamo Ko. Maguire never tells his audience how the Wizard moves from traveling salesman to traveling magician, to Wizard, but Maguire is fairly clear in showing that once the general public decided that he was ‘Wonderful,’ then the rest of Oz merely fell in line with the idea with little struggle and rarely more complaint than any government deals with in the face of change. Due to the fact that so many people generally agreed that he was such a so-called ‘wonderful’ man, it eventually became something seen as absolute truth, even though most people did not have any real proof of his existence, let alone of his wonderfulness. This runs parallel to Oz’s general belief that Elphaba is Wicked, even though most people did not have anything to prove or disprove her Wickedness besides rumors that she started herself.
This leads into a discussion of good versus evil and the general ambiguity that this debate shows when using *Wicked* as its foundation. Who is to say that the Wizard is “good” and that Elphaba is “wicked?” *Wicked: The Musical* brings up a good point: “Elphaba, where I’m from, we believe all sorts of things that aren’t true. We call it— ‘history.’/ A man’s called a traitor— or liberator/ A rich man’s a thief— or philanthropist/ Is one a crusader— or ruthless invader/?/ It’s all in which label/ Is able to persist.” (Schwartz). From what L. Frank Baum tells us in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, The Wizard is from Kansas, and so in this quote he is referring to America’s, and really the rest of the world’s, idea of ‘history.’ His point, however, is that it does not really matter what may actually be true, but if one can merely give themselves the desired label, then they can be whatever it is they want to be. This acceptance of the existence of moral ambiguities is represented throughout the novel.

“‘You’re not wicked,’ said Boq.

‘How do you know? It’s been so long,’ said the Witch, but she smiled at him.

Boq returned the smile, warmly. ‘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? People who claim that they’re evil are usually no worse than the rest of us.’ He sighed. ‘It’s people who claim that they’re good, or any way better than the rest of us, that you have to be wary of.’

‘Like Nessarose,’ said Milla meanly, but she was telling the truth, too, and they all nodded.” (Maguire 357)
This acknowledgement of the incredible ambiguity of not only Elphaba and the Wizard, but of Nessarose and really anyone else in Oz is repeated throughout the book. However, many of these themes and ideas are also seen heavily in “No One Mourns the Wicked.”

“No One Mourns the Wicked”

In Wicked the Musical’s opening number, “No One Mourns The Wicked,” the crowd is rejoicing in Elphaba’s death. G(a)linda joins the mob and almost tries to defend Elphie: “Are people born Wicked? Or do they have Wickedness thrust upon them? After all, she had a father. She had a mother, as so many do . . .” (Schwartz). This particular line reflects one of the major themes of Wicked: fate verses free will. Many of the songs in Wicked actually reflect this theme, such as “I’m Not That Girl” and “Defying Gravity.”

Another interesting line of G(a)linda’s is: “Isn’t it nice to know/ That good will conquer evil?/ The truth we all believe’ll by and by/ outlive a lie (Schwartz)..” At first glance, she is claiming that Elphaba is just as wicked as they all think she is and that she got what she deserved by receiving a deadly bucket of water to the face. However, through closer examination at her voice within the music, it can be seen that she is actually taking on a satirical tone in the first half of this line. Particularly, the fact that she refers to the truth as “the truth we all believe” as opposed to simply, “the truth,” is a testament to the fact that she does not fully believe what she is saying. Because of this, the line could possibly be translated to something along the lines of, “it does not matter what the actual truth is, but if enough people believe something with utter certainty, then it is considered true and will outlive what enough people believe with utter certainty to be a lie.” This even touches on the fact that when something is considered to be true for so long, oftentimes it does come true. This can be seen in the musical when Elphaba is frustrated with constantly being considered Wicked and finally takes on that role in “No Good
Deed” in *Wicked: The Musical*, or how she kind of goes insane in part V of *Wicked* and lets everyone think such things of her: “People always did like to talk, didn’t they? That’s why I call myself a witch now: the Wicked Witch of the West, if you want the full glory of it. As long as people are going to call you a lunatic anyway, why not get the benefit of it? It liberates you from convention.” (Maguire 357) The general populace believed that she was wicked for so long that it became truth. However, one question is, how did she finally fulfill this roll of Wickedness? What lead her to this path?

In the flashback to Elphaba’s birth in “No One Mourns The Wicked,” Elphaba’s father’s reaction to her pigmentation is, “Take it away… take it away!” (Schwartz). This shows how alienated she was from even her own family from the earliest of post-womb ages. Even at birth, she was cast into the “other” category, as in “anyone not just like everyone else.” This suggests that Elphaba’s past was so muddled with alienation and lacking love that it turned her into the wicked woman that she became. Was it her fate to be green, and therefore hated by those she was born to love? Was this hatred made to be the beginnings of her life as the Wicked Witch of the West? Had she not been so despised by her family, would she still have become the Wicked Witch of the West? This theme of fate versus destiny is reflected in the entire book. Gregory Maguire’s deconstruction of L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is mainly based on defending the character of the Wicked Witch of the West and questioning if everything had to turn out the way it did. This song opens up the entire defense of Baum’s character of The Wicked Witch of the West and Maguire’s character of Elphaba.

The combination of these lines from “Wonderful” and “No One Mourns the Wicked” prove to the audience that yes, *Wicked: The Musical*, gives Elphaba a defense rather than an accusation, though in no way does it excuse her actions. Admittedly, she had a difficult life, she
was despised by her father, alienated by the world, and generally assumed to have something wrong with her from birth. Eventually, this got to her and she became what everyone expected her to be. In no way does it excuse her behavior and eventual turn to the dark side in her insanity, however, it does beg the keen listener to understand that she was pushed to her wickedness and that it seems she did not have much of a choice. However, any reader or listener is still told to beg the question, was it really fate? Did she have a choice?

“What Is This Feeling”

In the beginning of the first act, G(a)linda and Elphaba meet for the first time and declare their loathing for each other. This is interesting simply because it both describes the beginnings of their relationships, but actually brings it to a much higher level of dislike than there was in the book. Though they did not particularly like each other to begin with, it was never said that they fully loathed each other as the musical suggests: “Let’s just say- I loath it all! Every little trait how ever small makes my very flesh begin to crawl with simple utter loathing!” (Schwartz). This is a rather large hyperbole considering the most they seem to feel for each other is annoyance: “They didn’t talk much. Galinda was too busy forging alliances with the better girls who had been her rightful roomie prospects. . . . And Elphaba showed no sign of expecting Galinda’s company, which was a relief.” (Maguire 74). Much of their feelings towards each other sounded like this, mildly annoyed at most, apathetic at least. This catchy tune may be one of Wicked the Musical’s more famous songs, but it is also one that does not necessarily fit with the book at all. However, even in this song, there are hints of the original book:

“(Ensemble) Dear Galinda, you are just too good! How do you stand it, I don't think I could. She's a terror, she's a tartar, we don't mean to show a bias but Galinda, you're a martyr!
(Galinda) Well, these things are sent to try us...

(Ensemble) Poor Galinda, forced to reside with someone so disgusticified, We just want to tell you, we're all on your side (Schwartz)."

Looking at this, the “us” versus “them” effect is very clear. More specifically, the “us” verses “her” feeling to this song is very clear. This widely mirrors the book in showing how alienated Elphaba was from everyone. Overall, the song does not serve the purpose that it should have in the musical, yet a purpose can still be found for it.

Mainly, it shows her complete alienation from everyone else and aids in the previously laid idea from “No One Mourns the Wicked” that this alienation that she was so used to caused her wickedness, and therefore supports the idea that she was possibly destined to become wicked, but also begs the question, what if people had simply been less cruel? Would that have changed it? Was it those people’s fates to be so cruel to Elphaba, or was it their free will?

“Something Bad”

Elphaba was a huge supporter of Animal rights, and this is something that was reflected heavily in her duet with Doctor Dillamond, “Something Bad.” Mainly, it goes through a few examples of what is going on with some of the animals in Oz: “I’ve heard of an Ox/ A professor from Quox/ No longer permitted to teach/ Who has lost all powers of speech/ And an Owl in Munchkin Rock/ A vicar with a thriving flock/ Forbidden to preach/ Now he only can screech!” (Schwartz). One of the big ideas that is conquered in Wicked is the idea of Animal rights, which translates into our world’s human rights. Because Elphaba felt very strongly about this, the reader begins to feel very strongly for it as well, and the musical echoes that passion in “Something Bad.”

“Dancing Through Life”
Fiyero first appears in “Dancing Through Life,” where he is depicted as a prep-school bad boy that has been kicked out of one too many schools. G(a)linda immediately falls for him, Boq is left in the dust, and everyone is whisked away to the Ozdust Ballroom. Comparing this grand entrance to that of walking into class late and getting attacked by a set of animated antlers, it is no wonder why so many people disregard the musical. It completely disregards the character’s social standing, general personality traits, and even level of popularity at Shiz. One theory is that the writers of the musical combined the characters of Avaric and Fiyero from the book, and considering that Avaric was depicted as more of a popular, party boy with his ventures to the Philosophy Club, and his general bad-boy image, whereas Fiyero was depicted as much quieter and more awkward, this idea is not exactly far-fetched.

In *Wicked the Musical*, Fiyero is depicted saying: “Dancing through life/ skimming the surface/ gliding where turf is smooth/ life’s more painless/ for the brainless/ why think too hard?/ When it’s so soothing/ dancing through life/ no need to tough it/ when you can sluff [sic] it off as I do/ nothing matters/ but knowing nothing matters/ it’s just life/ so keep dancing through . . .” (Schwartz). If this text is looked at in the context of the musical in general, then it could be considered a frivolous catchy tune meant to give people the wrong impression of Fiyero, or to show how his relationship with Elphaba changed him over the course of time.

However, if the general idea of the song is taken in context with the book, it defines the pleasure faith rather well. The idea of the pleasure faith in Oz is based on the idea that enjoying one’s life is more important that anything else. It takes on an almost atheistic view point that there is no afterlife or reincarnation, or anything else to make a person’s actions take on true meaning. This very much takes on the “you’re born, you live, and you die” philosophy of live, and that is very clearly shown in this song. One could also consider this song to be a kind of
anthem to the Pleasure Faith. The Pleasure Faith is considered to be strictly composed of those who want to live life in the moment and make themselves happy as often as possible.

This touch of religion added to the pot is incredibly helpful as far as conquering different ideas of the novel is concerned. It is really the icing on the cake and shows the audience how diverse the musical is and how much it reflects the book.

By placing the songs and their lyrics in context with the book and not the musical, and focusing more on the overall themes of the songs as opposed to the plot devices, it can be seen that they do coincide. Though the plots are completely different, the overall themes of the musical can be found. Much of the heavier material is placed into the songs and almost hidden in the parts that many people do not look at closely. However, through open eyes and open ears, a reader/listener can definitely find relations between the two and see how the two really work with each other. If more people saw these larger themes and ideas in the musical, then they would not dismiss it quite so hastily. So go and see the musical and really listen to the lyrics before a decision is made about the legitimacy of Stephen Schwartz’s musical.

Works Cited


