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Journal

Humanities Honors Program 2026

Author

Meskel, Cassie

Publication Date

2026-05-15

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“Holding Space for Online Camp: How *Wicked*’s Circulation on Social Media Reveals a New Age of Arbiters and Campsite”

Cassie Meskel

May 2026

Abstract

This thesis examines how the reception practice or aesthetic sensibility known as camp is exercised in the 21st century. It explores the contemporary avenues in which the sensibility appears and evolves, namely, social media platforms. Through sites such as X and Instagram, it investigates the range of content that emerged from the *Wicked* franchise and its seemingly never-ending press tour. From users making press tour parodies to adding *Wicked* images to arbitrary posts, this thesis identifies where the essence of camp develops. It begins with one of the most recognized and remixed moments from the press tour, the *Out* Magazine interview by Tracy E. Gilchrist with Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, and examines its varied responses to assess where a sense of esoterism differentiates parody makers from camp creators. Users’ inability to perceive or play into the humor highlights how camp receptors communicate through the content’s visual and linguistic language. Furthermore, this thesis highlights the queerness found in the *Wicked* franchise, underlining the gay sensibility that inspires the qualities that are most integral to camp, preparing the text to be circulated in an online camp culture. In addition, it emphasizes how an online camp culture differs from a traditional one, as social media profiles more visibly exhibit the roles of women, as well as anonymous users, as arbiters and receptors, which expands the expectation of a camp audience. Finally, this thesis discovers how the

incongruities and referentiality that transform *Wicked* content are applied to other texts as users revisit camp canon with a unique sense of humor, defining the practice of online camp.

Introduction

The cultural phenomenon of the *Wicked* (Chu, 2024) film adaptation's press tour and the memes that emerged from it reveal that social media facilitates the evolution of a contemporary camp. These online platforms function by remixing and referencing popular culture, help cultivate an online niche with a shared language, and encourage a revisiting of classic camp texts. The first film's press tours have generated widely recognized pop culture moments, notably including Tracy E. Gilchrist's interview with Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande on "holding space" with the lyrics of "Defying Gravity," during which Grande supportively holds onto Erivo's pointer finger. Signified by this peculiar pose, the moment has reverberated in celebrity recreations, reaction images, and captions, creating a language that only the culturally fluent can decipher. Online users either criticize these unusual moments or the actresses' emotional image as ridiculous instances of celebrity artificiality and excessiveness, or they love them for the same reasons. Despite this moment's polarizing response, it doesn't carry any tangible meaning; rather, it's the making of meaning and playing into failed seriousness that divides the arbiters of contemporary camp from others who criticize or laugh at its nonsensical weirdness. Additionally, the ways in which *Wicked* gets referenced and remixed, and with which kinds of media, reveal the social media campers who stand in contrast to mainstream, meaningless parodies. The campness of the "holding space" moment in the aforementioned interview is largely constructed through users' commentary, references, and multimedia layers, which are supported by the design of online platforms. The most evident camping of *Wicked* is seen when users isolate elements from the film, such as quotes, through humorous captions or

images, thereby demonstrating a functionality that points to a composite meaning—one available for interpretation and reception by an in-the-know online community. Canonical camp texts beloved by queer audiences, such as *Glee* (2009-2012) and *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), serve as intertexts in which to insert *Wicked* references, incorporating the text into the camp canon and connoting it as a queer text.

Moreover, audiences' identification of queerness within the *Wicked* franchise, from the novel to the movie, further reflects and attracts a queer audience. Centering two female co-leads that exemplify a paragon of friendship or provide a queer interpretation, *Wicked* represents and addresses a more inclusive straight and queer female following, expanding the audience of traditional camp culture. The distinction that arises in modern digital camp is the democratization of the practice, as any user can access and participate in online camping, as long as they're fluent. There exists an emphasis on referentiality over identity, as people's identities are at times ambiguous in their social media accounts, expanding the culture further. Furthermore, just as users act as arbiters to create a camp reception around *Wicked*, they revisit other texts that are put up for reinterpretation, even pulling from camp's existing canon. Following camp's fascination with incongruities, users respond to *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939) with contemporary humor, maintaining the citationality of camp texts. Users either incorporate modern vernacular or references to contemporary media, building upon *The Wizard of Oz* as if it were a part of 21st century pop culture. As a result, these anachronistic posts engage a specific online community that shares knowledge and humor rooted in juxtaposition and referentiality. Rather than replacing a sensibility that has endured for generations, social media is expediting another phase in its evolution; evidently, *Wicked* and its promotion and discourse highlight social media's aptitude to function as a campsite. Due to online platforms' accessibility, anyone can reach the culture

through search features or their algorithm, whose design favors quotable fragments, such as the visual and linguistic components that make up online camp culture. Users acquire the cultural fluency needed to keep up with the culture, exhibiting how social media is an effective vehicle for training new audiences to indulge in online camp. Online platforms assist with the evolution of camp, supporting the exchange of a growing canon, evolving language, and expanding the culture beyond expectations of its arbiters' identities.

Conversation on Camp

Camp is an esoteric practice of naming and sharing a canon of texts, humor, and style that numerous scholars have sought to define. A definitive description doesn't exist, but notable commentators have agreed that the artistic sensibility is founded upon a few qualities: artifice, exaggeration, theatricality, duplicity, eccentricity, and incongruity, while other traits vary from person to person. However, identifying these qualities is retrospective, meaning they cannot prescribe the sensibility enough to predict what becomes camp or how it starts. Ultimately, no writer can explicate the aesthetic vision and tastes of a universal "beholder," or camp arbiter, nor a homogeneous camp essence in objects. Susan Sontag details common camp themes in her foundational essay "Notes on Camp," claiming that the sensibility functions as a "private code" (1) as its creation and dissemination rely on arbiters and participants who indicate what content is being circulated and how it transforms. The culture's esoteric language and artifacts draw a line between practitioners and outsiders. The latter may be aware of how something is admired or how something appears "off" (3), but cannot envision how it gains its camp discernment, let alone contribute to the active camping of an object, for camp is also a behavior. It is "one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation" (5), which emphasizes the importance of transformability in camp texts, as the culture is an active, engaging process,

not a passive form of critique. Moreover, Sontag elucidates the distinction between intentional and naïve camp. The former is created with an aim of camp reception, whereas the latter is a genuine effort with “the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve” (7) that doesn’t land as expected. The juxtaposition between a serious intention and a spectacular failure is where the purest form of camp emerges. In other words, the essential element of naïve, or pure, camp is failed seriousness.

Writing about wit rather than camp per se, John Mitzel describes a similar double interpretation inspired by the gay sensibility. Out of an inability to completely eliminate the components of an oppressive normative society, “the homosexualist develops a forked-tongue” (155), an ability to layer contrasting meanings onto original material to code the world in another perspective. Marginalized cultures can subtly communicate among their members through language and symbols, much like the Aestheticists representing their allegiance through green carnations in the 19th century. Social media users represent a similar talent for double meaning by not discarding mainstream content online but transforming it through additive reactions (quote retweets, comments), offering an altered artifact for online camp circulation. In “Camp’s Distribution: ‘Our’ Aesthetic Category,” Michael Dango reinforces that aesthetic categories are social, for people define a collective vision through corroboration, asking questions such as, “[D]on’t you agree?” (39). Social media users rely on this tendency, as their site serves as a communicative platform. Construction of an online culture relies on consistent validation, facilitated by the platform’s like and share mechanisms that maintain a trend or joke. A single user cannot create a community of one, so they must offer up their language and images to ensure they are recycled across the Web. Within smaller pockets of the Internet, more distinctive cultures arise.

Jack Babuscio offered one of the first attempts to describe “the” gay sensibility, specifying its importance to the development of camp. The gay sensibility, “a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream” (19) or a heightened awareness of society’s heterosexual order, represents a “unity of perspective among gays that gives to someone or something its characteristic camp flavour” (20). Though gay and camp sensibilities aren’t the same, the former gives meaning to the most integral parts of camp, providing insight into how camp’s sense of double meaning forms. The gay sensibility manifests in irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor to expose an “incongruous contrast” (20) between how things are and how things could be. For instance, theatricality exhibits the juxtaposition of “being versus role-playing” (24). Incongruities are a key component of the camp sensibility. They point out an agency in presentation, as Babuscio calls the fabrication of style a form of consciousness, and a deviation from the norm, thereby challenging the status quo. Generally, these traits function upon intention, as consciousness is required to subvert or exaggerate what most abide by. The gay sensibility cannot be written out of camp’s conversation, as the perspective informs how camp comes to be.

Defying Gravity of the Situation: Gilchrist’s Sensational Interview

Out of the many definitions of camp, Babuscio proclaims a fitting sentiment: camp is in the eye of the beholder (119), or as Thomas Hess declares, camp “exists in the smirk of the beholder” (qtd. Flinn, 145). Nevertheless, it takes more than recognition to build a subsequent culture. On social media platforms, namely X, Instagram, and TikTok, camp lies in the hands of the creators and their reposters. The first *Wicked* movie’s press tour—which started in March 2024 when its stars, Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, appeared at the Oscars in gowns that matched their characters (Zuckerman, Hamja, 2025)—offered an era rich with camp potential, as

it burst with eccentric fashion, dramatic personalities, and exaggerated performance. The press tour's peak occurred in November 2024, concurrent with the film's release date, when its most notable instance—the aforementioned “holding space” interview—took place, inspiring inescapable content and recreations. Gilchrist, a reporter for the national LGBTQ+ online magazine *Out*, interviewed the leading ladies of *Wicked*, whose glamorous apparel evoked their characters once again. Gilchrist first congratulates Erivo as *Out*'s Icon of the Year, then inquires with Grande about Glinda and Elphaba's “love story.” Grade responds in her modern rendition of a transatlantic accent. Afterwards, Gilchrist reveals that she'd seen people “taking the lyrics of ‘Defying Gravity’ and really holding space with that and feeling power in that” and asks Erivo to expand upon her character's mindset at that point in the film. Unexpectedly, Erivo's face is immediately struck with wonder and gratitude, at least on the surface. She holds her hand to her chest and softly voices, “Uh, I didn't know that was happening.” Gilchrist nods, as if they're discussing the same tangible phenomenon—“I've seen it, yeah.” Erivo is touched—“That's really powerful... That's what I wanted,”—and Grande's fingertips gently clutch Erivo's pointer finger in support (Figure 1). Her carefully posed hand—like a dainty Barbie doll part—unnaturally suspends Erivo's finger over the seat's armrest. Each of the actresses' nails, but mainly Erivo's glamorously long acrylics, protrude as a paragon of the theatricality and embellishment they've displayed throughout the press tour. This unnatural pose became the image that soon blew up. Erivo pretends to have learned about something—“I didn't know that was happening”—and Gilchrist reassures her that



Figure 1: Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo “holding space” with *Out* Magazine (YouTube, Advocate Channel, 2024).

whatever they're talking about exists in a few "posts" that she's seen. After all, "[she's] in queer media" (Gilchrist, 2024). Once the clip was posted on Reels (Instagram's video page), users' comical reactions accumulated thousands of likes as people banded together in confusion, fascination, and criticism over the moment, as it's unclear what the phenomenon is that Gilchrist claimed to have witnessed. In a follow-up interview with Erivo, Grande, and *Wicked* director Jon M. Chu for *Variety*, the actresses reveal that they were clueless about Gilchrist's confession the whole time (Variety, 2024). Erivo had no idea that "holding space" was even a phrase, as it typically connotes curating a safe environment by being emotionally, physically, and mentally present. The interviewees' emotional performance was absolutely artificial, making the moment already somewhat camp from the start.

Along with the interview's excess of theatrics, other elements can also be seen as exaggerations. Barbara Klinger expresses that "gay camp has been attracted to styles and objects that could illuminate the inherent constructedness of presumed natural categories of gender" (Klinger, 135), such as stylistic trends that prove how society invents its image of a woman. Compared to the outfits many women wear today, the glamorous fashions of classic Hollywood actresses look like costumes. Detached from the era in which they were normalized, these vintage fashions are available for any camp practitioner to adopt or remix, no longer considered a mainstream norm. The Hollywood style continues to represent an excessively feminine look that now demonstrates intention, not conformity, as antiquated trends point out the fabrication



Figure 2: Erivo and Grande at the 2024 Paris Olympics (Nackstrand, Getty Images, 2024).

of gender performances. Throughout the *Wicked* press tour, Grande and Erivo don similar styles, evoking classic Hollywood looks through drop waists, hourglass silhouettes, bracelet-length gloves, and sunhats. Their ensembles at the 2024 Paris Olympics (Figure 2) are a prime example of this lavish vintage glamour. At the same time, their looks overwhelmingly mirror the characters they portray. On the celebrity fashion blog *Tom + Lorenzo*, Tom Fitzgerald and Lorenzo Marquez compare the 2024 press tour to “an extended costume party” (Fitzgerald, Marquez), as the looks are more reminiscent of cosplay, not high fashion. At the Australian premiere, Grande wore a pale pink ballgown, adorned with puffy sleeves and glittering decals, comparable to Billie Burke’s Glinda costume in *The Wizard of Oz*. Fitzgerald and Marquez critique it as “incredibly on point - to excess” (Fitzgerald, Marquez). Meanwhile, Erivo’s witchy black dress was accompanied by a “gimmicky” Cowardly Lion brooch. At the Los Angeles premiere, the actresses appeared in “Halloween costumes” (Fitzgerald, Marquez) once again, with Cynthia in a sleek green gown and Grande in a full pink dress. In regards to Grande’s 2025 Oscars look, they call the Garland homage, a ruby gown with a slipper attached to the back, “one of the dumbest things [they’ve] ever seen,” as it is far too “obvious” (Fitzgerald, Marquez). With each look, Fitzgerald and Marquez emphasize the excess of thematic references that turn couture



Figure 3: Grande channeling Glinda’s costume in “One Short Day” (Tag24, 2024).

into cosplay. What’s ironic is that the authors don’t critique Grande’s UK premiere look (Figure 3), which imitates Glinda’s stage costume in “One Short Day.” Her yellow dress copies the color, but her green glasses are nearly identical to the prop used on stage. Together, Erivo and Grande’s appearances

represent a striking dichotomy between the sleek, celestial, witchy, and the sweet, bubbly, flouncy.

In Gilchrist's interview, their corseted gowns exhibit a similar level of thematic references and glamour, incorporating character-specific color palettes. Erivo and Grande had committed to "method-dressing" during the entirety of the press tour, from international premieres to magazine interviews. Compared to other actresses' typical interview outfits, these looks stand out for being highly decorative and referential, purposefully playing off of other texts, such as the 1939 film and stage musical. They present specific elements that can only be appreciated by the proper audience, indicating a level of knowledge required to engage with them. The interview outfits create an obvious contrast, especially when juxtaposed with Gilchrist's minimalistic shirt and blazer. In a camp eye, it even appears humorous. In contrast to her modern and simplistic outfit, Grande and Erivo's impractical gowns indicate that the stars' appearances are therefore conscious performances of excessive femininity and embellishment.

Furthermore, though some users admire the actresses' close bond displayed in the interview, many view it as an instance of fakeness and failed seriousness, for the profound attitudes they put on were revealed to be hollow once the interviewees admitted ignorance. This makes it a moment of naive camp—the purest kind, according to Sontag's definition. Recreations emphasize the enormous impact this moment had on pop culture, with different celebrity pairings replicating the finger hold, from Timothee Chalamet and Elle Fanning in an interview with Gilchrist for *The Advocate* to Oprah and Erivo herself at the 2025 Tony Awards. Examining the range of content that the original interview sparked, a distinctive difference in intention and effect stands out. Parodies are straightforward replications, lacking originality and artistic purpose, as they reduce the iconic finger hold to a singular punchline. On the other hand, certain

social media posts reflect the nonsensical but humorous quality of the original text, accreting meaning to amplify the finger-hold moment. It was users' camping of the moment that amplified it, for they dissected a meaningless interview to fashion a new vernacular and visual language for a marginal audience.

Range of Reactions

The variety of content made in response to the *Wicked* press tour demonstrates the evolution of an offbeat moment into the development of a camp culture online and its constituent members. Three types of content summarize the steps from a distinct, bizarre moment to a component of an online camp canon. First, users react through snowclone memes, then queer text remixes, and finally, a discreet language that informs abstract concepts. When Gilchrist's interview was first posted on Reels, many users relied on already memeified sayings as formats to make a comical post. Just a week after the Reel was posted, X user Seosamh (@dayglowj0e) reacted to an interview repost (Figure 4) with the isolated caption, "you're laughing? people are taking the lyrics of defying gravity and really holding space with that and you're laughing?" in reference to *Joker* (Phillips, 2019). The use of this quote, which originally says, "Two policemen are in critical condition and you're laughing. You're laughing," (*Joker* 1:44:44), expressing genuine admonishment in the film,



Figure 4: Seosamh making a *Joker* (2019) reference on X (X/@dayglowj0e, November 21, 2024).

reflects an ironic twist of a serious moment, much like the emotional exchange displayed in the interview. Where Seosamh references parts from the original interview, other users replace those words with whichever text or pop culture moment they're joking about. The structure of the sentence remains, but the quote is rendered irrelevant to its origin. This style of meme depends on phrasal templates, also known as "snowclones," first coined by linguists Geoff Pullum and Glem Whitman to describe cliché sentences whose variables are interchangeable (Hartmann and Ungerer, 2023). For instance, the *Joker* meme is considered a "snowclone [meme]" to satirize the gravity of unimportant situations (Philipp). Thus, this style of meme indicates that Seosamh's post isn't exclusive or original to Gilchrist's interview. This snowclone is used to poke fun at the dialogue, uninfluenced by the content of its phrasal template, *Joker*, and abstaining from commenting on *Wicked* or Gilchrist's interview beyond its absurdity. Aside from exact replications of the finger hold, this type of content is the least camp, as it expresses no recognition of a deeper meaning and carries the least power to transform texts.

The next range of content appears similar, but it has more potential for camp, as the meme formulas reference their origin, thus carry meaning, and are remixed with another text. The chosen media appeals to interests that align with a camp online culture, whether it embodies the gay sensibility or evokes the right qualities. The ensuing examples indicate *Wicked's* association with queer media, then reveal its comparison to existing online camp canon, supporting its own consideration as a camp text. Buzzing Pop's verified X account exhibits the following posts that build on the joke of "holding space", conveying a sense of humor that lies between mainstream recreations and esoteric camp. On X,



Figure 5: Andres makes a reference to both *Wicked* and *Glee* (X, @barbzforbernie, November 21, 2024).

Andres (@barbzforbernie) writes, “they were the first to take the lyrics of defying gravity and really hold space with that” (Figure 5), a nonspecific line that’s informed by a screencap of *Glee*, a TV series about a high school glee club that portrays the sensibility of theater people who deal with social issues, sexuality, and relationship drama in-between musical numbers. Since the first season aired, LGBTQ-identified fans have found community through *Glee* on Tumblr (McCracken, 156) and been inspired to create content, as “*Glee* [had] the highest number of fan stories based on any television series on... Fanfiction.net” (Lamerichs, 112) in 2013. More than a decade later, thanks to streaming and social media, the show’s fandom remains, combining fans from each music genre, though predominantly musical theater. Andres’s post exhibits two primary characters, Kurt Hummel and Rachel Berry, but the post requires audiences to recall the *Wicked*-themed “diva-off”—and their love for the musical—that the characters have on the show. As opposed to the *Joker* meme, this post can only operate for knowledgeable audiences, for it’s as much about *Glee* as *Wicked* and its press tour. With a prominent young, queer following and LGBTQ+ subject matter, *Glee* content attracts an audience akin to the traditional camp crowd and arguably trained multiple younger generations in the ways of camp. With the addition of a *Wicked* press tour reference, the target audience for this post shrinks to the point that it necessitates fluency in the visual language (Kurt and Rachel’s image) and quotes (“holding space”) of both these texts. This specific sense of humor and mixture of media aims for a marginal audience, or a community of taste, that is acquainted with a shared canon. *Glee* associates *Wicked* as a queer text, one that engages LGBTQ+ audiences, positioning it in the lens of the gay sensibility. To reiterate Babuscio’s insights, this awareness promotes the possibility of camp content.

In a similar post, X user Chris Murphy (@christress) speaks through the voice of Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City*, writing, “I couldn’t help but wonder... if Big could hold space for the lyrics of Defying Gravity, why couldn’t he hold space for me?” referencing the character’s columnist vernacular, much like a snowclone meme. Users take the beginning of this phrase and follow it with arbitrary content, but still incorporate show elements as they play upon Carrie’s concerns, such as her relationship with Mr. Big. The meme differs from typical snowclones, for Murphy evokes Bradshaw’s style of speaking but doesn’t utilize an exact formula, relying on creativity to impersonate the show. These memes aren’t characterized by snowclones alone, as their significance lies in their referenced texts. Like Andres’s post, Murphy incorporates Gilchrist’s interview into a format that is actually about *Sex and the City (SATC)*, as it references Bradshaw’s formulaic narration in each episode. Thus, it can only engage a specific audience that is familiar with the show’s content and vernacular. *SATC* can be seen as another piece of online camp, as it’s used in a similar fashion to *Wicked* and its promotion. Through the voice of the show’s fabulous and messy main character, Murphy performs her persona as he mimics her words, for Carrie’s energetic, stylish, and dramatic personality is worthy of camp status. A self-indulgent but sociable character in a highly decorated and glamorous show seems to thrive in the hands of camp arbiters, as she is constantly circulated through still images, such as the previous meme. Not only that, GIFs taken from various points in the show are constantly distributed across X as reaction memes, even more so than Carrie’s phrasal template.

SATC and *Wicked* are similarly camp as they are some of the texts that get frequently circulated online through low-resolution GIFs, which are “the campiest cultural form so far provided by the Internet” (Dango, 47), according to Michael Dango. The compressed detail and limited color palette create a “cheap sort of look” compared to the “high-gloss corporate

aesthetics on the Internet,” offering a juxtaposition that aligns with camp incongruities. In addition, Dango writes that the “content they most often take—brief and edited clips of television shows,” for instance, “is what makes GIFs so frequently camp,” as it reflects camp’s social practice. Users around the globe offer elements from their respective cultures and tastes to create multi-layered texts for the reception of a narrow, knowledgeable community. More meaning gets imbued into what would be a few frames from a seemingly random piece of media. In the hands of social media users, GIFs transform pop culture, fictional scenes, and actors’ expressions into visually conveyed messages. A GIF of Carrie Bradshaw clumsily shaking her head, or Grande holding onto Erivo’s finger may indicate someone’s somber feeling, sometimes accompanied by a descriptive caption to amplify the humor of the post. For instance, *SATC* proves its camp status as different “Carrie GIFs” circulate each week. While GIFs are camp tools, the utilized texts retain their humor and meaning beyond the medium, with users referencing specific GIFs in a meta way. Some users appreciate the GIF itself, aside from its connotations, as suvi (X user @suvisdiary) writes, “carrie disco gif world domination,” revealing the culture built around these moving images. *Wicked* GIFs are even more referential because a year after the initial press tour, Anu (X user @rollinalongshwn) declares, “no film press tour has generated as many iconic gif memes as the wicked one” (Figure 6). During the peak of the first movie’s press tour, their algorithm would’ve made it seem that way, as an endless number of Cynthia Erivo GIFs saturated online platforms, each one as iconic



Figure 6: Anu reflects upon the virality of *Wicked* GIFs (X, @rollinalongshwn, November 10, 2025).

as the next. Erivo's animated expressions have been referenced so much that users describe them within asterisks or brackets, like when Mateo (X user @lesbianoflight) writes, “*cynthia erivo head tapping gif*” and users understand exactly what the creator means. However, this abstract reference to Erivo lies more in the third, most camp category of content. This comparison of GIFs demonstrates that *Wicked* contends with *SATC* as a camp online text, for its circulation and remixing exhibit an active reception practice.

Evidently, this second category of *Wicked* reactions demonstrates camp's ritual of combining references into a media mashup. The fusion of *Wicked* with other pieces of media that are seen as queer or camp, such as *Glee* and *SATC*, includes the franchise and its discourse into an online camp canon. Another instance of *Wicked*'s inclusion into a queer social media niche is X user Brendan's (@Brenbash) post that reads, “I hate gay Halloween what do you mean your [sic] Cynthia Erivo's acrylic nail” with a photo of his head poking out of a seemingly ten-foot replica of Erivo's bedazzled stiletto nail. Gay Halloween, an Internet term for costumes of esoteric elements from pop culture, serves as an indicator of what makes it into the online camp canon, as its examples are similarly hard to explain in terms of why they work. Through the gay Halloween phrasal template, this post highlights the queer following of *Wicked*'s star, designating the franchise as a part of an online queer culture, which amplifies the resource of texts from which to make camp content.

The final stage of content creation is the most camp. These posts help transform *Wicked* press tour moments into something with meaning, rather than having its references apply to fitting situations in other texts. *Wicked*'s most abstract uses demonstrate how social media users deconstruct a text to construct a camp online culture. Rather than leaning into the meaning that was expressed in the interview, as the actresses' professed befuddlement and feigned authenticity

prove there wasn't any, users impart their own stories, feelings, and humor. Many of these posts reflect areas of camp interest, such as sardonic pity, using elements from the *Wicked* press tour as a new language that carries the fabricated meaning. In addition, users disconnect elements from the original source, such as images of the actresses, specific quotes, and, as previously stated, Cynthia Erivo GIFs. In an X post from April 2026 (Figure 7), Ella (@rhaenyravalley) reveals, "just saw a tweet of someone saying they watch netflix on 1.5x speed," a statement that bears no relevance or resemblance to *Wicked* or its press tour, yet she includes a photo of Erivo with the



Figure 7: Ella utilizes the vocabulary of online camp, as the post makes no reference to *Wicked* content (X, @rhaenyravalley, April 7, 2026).

caption, "I didn't know that was happening." The actress's name is listed at the bottom, making the image look like it comes from a collection of profound quote edits. The juxtaposition of a serious, professionally taken red carpet photograph with a brief statement stemming from the absurd, nonsensical interview evokes a camp essence. However, this post does something more; it exhibits Erivo's symbolic meaning, where her words are an addition to many social media users'

vocabulary. Ella doesn't provide any context as to why Erivo is pictured, but the quote gives a little clue. Erivo's appearance signifies puzzlement, as the quote ties back to Gilchrist's interview in which all participants were confused. Though this is a more straightforward instance of *Wicked* and its press tour being used as a language that constitutes online camp, it makes its persistence and symbology clear.

The Cynthia Erivo GIFs are a paramount example of this stage of reactions, as they function similarly to the previous post but are more frequently used to augment abstract content. As mentioned, the *Wicked* press tour culminated in a variety of popular GIFs in addition to its viral interview screencaps. Clips of Cynthia Erivo at different press events have been compressed into moving images and found their way into the niches of online platforms, such as “stan Twitter,” an extensive community of fans centered around different music icons and celebrities. This circle greatly overlaps with the audiences of the aforementioned texts, such as Arianators (Ariana Grande fans), revealing how they retrieve their online language. In appreciation of Erivo’s contribution towards “reaction gifs,” X user Sofia (@lacyspov) presents a handful of her GIFs (Figure 8), igniting users to comment their favorites. Scrolling through the comment section is ceaseless, as each user seems to present a new one. The sheer amount of GIFs attests to how much content the press tour has inspired. Each one represents an implicit understanding as users pair them with different messages, presenting the building blocks of an online camp vocabulary.



Figure 8: Sofia shares the viral Cynthia Erivo GIFs that are used as reaction memes (X, @lacyspov, November 10, 2025).

To expand on how these GIFs — as well as still images from the *Wicked* press tour — are used, each piece of media represents a community’s consensus of an implied meaning. Like how Mateo describes a GIF in asterisks, a user named “crash test dummy” (@the_moral_abc) doesn’t even rely on an image to convey unspoken meaning. In response to someone describing how

they sleep like they're in a coffin, crash test dummy also writes, "this is so... *Cynthia erivo headtap gif*," referencing Erivo tapping her head, eyes closed, when questioned by an interviewer on the red carpet. Here, the simple mention of Erivo evokes an image and meaning, as the moment signifies deep thinking and distinctiveness that comments upon the original poster's unusual sleeping style. With Mateo making an identical post, the GIF represents a consistent interpretation. This particular GIF has gained wide traction on the Internet, rivaling the quotability of the "holding space" interview, as the meme is commonly paired with the phrase, "the concept of __," (Sakshi), becoming an esoteric phrasal template of its own. Users follow the phrase with a pensive or eccentric statement, corroborating how Erivo tapping her head symbolizes deep thinking. The more abstract the post, the less explainable the language, and yet it continues to carry a tacit meaning. These kinds of references can be casually used as responses to mundane or unique statements, as crash test dummy does in a user's comment section. Regardless of the reference's exact definition, this creator is one of many social media users who fluently participate in the linguistic construction of online camp culture.

On Reels, a video from @lordecontent isolates Erivo and Grande's image in the same way (Figure 9). The actresses' green screen cutout comes from an interview where Erivo experiences an emotional moment right as a helicopter flies overhead. Grande puts her arm on her co-star as Erivo holds her face in her palm. Similar to the "holding space" interview, this

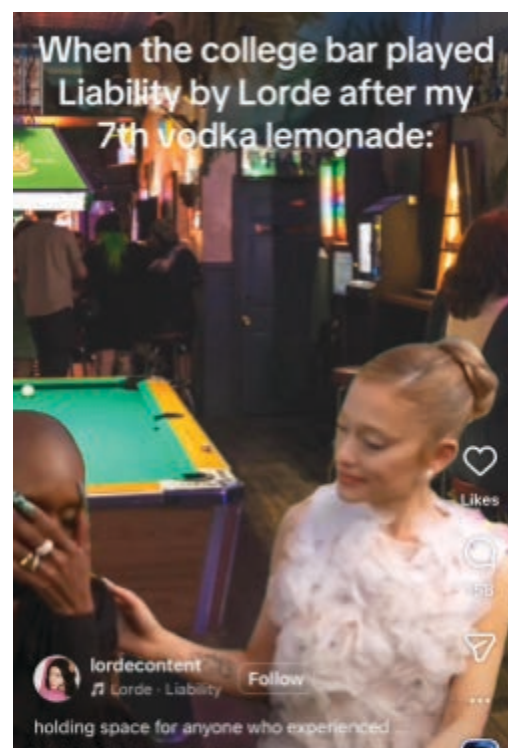


Figure 9: Erivo and Grande are isolated from their context but provide the emotional meaning to the Reel (Instagram, @lordecontent, November 28, 2024).

clip has circulated on social media platforms and appeared in the same range of content, as users meet an intensely emotional moment with comedy. In the Reel, the melodramatically posed actresses are overlaid on a background of a bar, accompanied by text that reads, “When the college bar played Liability by Lorde after my 7th vodka lemonade,” while the mentioned song plays. It even includes a holding space reference in the caption, exhibiting a double layering of *Wicked* press tour moments. At this stage of memeification, the post doesn’t involve *Wicked* beyond the actresses’ appearance. By now, the image’s unique sense of humor has developed, its meaning has been formulated, and it now informs unrelated content with its understood meaning. Its tacitness relies upon an informed community, pointing to the existence of a complex construction of a camp culture online. Moreover, while the layering of multiple meanings and texts (*Wicked* press tour and Lorde music) contributes to a camp effect, the Reel evokes a common camp fascination: irony and juxtaposition. Erivo and Grande’s memeified appearance satirizes the unimportant content of the post, but it leans into the melodrama that produces a camp effect. Therefore, the result of using *Wicked* moments as linguistic and visual reactions online is a camp effect, as it either draws a contrast between serious content and ironic media or satirizes the entirety of a post.

Camp’s Language Barrier

For the reason that all types of communities are united by commonalities, it’s inevitable that some people fail to comprehend what keeps these groups together. Recognizing the various ways that *Wicked* posts reflect a contemporary camp sensibility and its members, a comparison of users who are ignorant of the codes of this culture further emphasizes its existence and strength. X user Daniel Liu (@danieldayliuis) voices his self-awareness of not possessing a camp eye, for in reference to Gilchrist’s interview, he admits, “...it’s almost like they are speaking a

language I don't understand... I'm not understanding the words or the feelings or the energy at all. It's amazing." Liu reveals awareness of something he cannot pin down—a quintessential quality of camp—but he cannot understand, name, or enhance it. Other unknowing users are less enamored by the superficiality of the interview, as X user Dallas (@realdcm) criticizes the actresses for being “[perpetually] performing,” and guilty of “feigned profundity.” Dallas lists the very reasons why a camp crowd is fascinated by the interview, but for those who are indifferent to these qualities, they do not recognize the sense of humor and language that developed in response to these press tour moments. This mirrors the distinction between those who comprehend and participate in the gay sensibility and those who don't. As Mitzel points out, “straights,” which refers to outsiders of this community, “often stop laughing and turn nasty,” knowing “they are barred from understanding” it (153). Social media's camp culture proves to have a style of communication and humor similar to that of the gay sensibility, which requires a level of understanding and an embrace of esoteric qualities. Users who interpret the campness of *Wicked* consciously utilize the contradiction of clueless actresses faking authenticity to invent quotes, images, and GIFs that would be used to illustrate referential and ironic content.

Discovering Queerness in *Wicked*

Although the layering of *Wicked* with texts like *Glee* and *SATC* engages queer followings, *Wicked* content doesn't solely rely on references to other texts to garner a queer audience, as many find it to be a queer text itself. Like X user @mouseaboli humorously echoes the words from Gilchrist's interview, “if wicked isn't queer media how did we end up holding space in the first place?” As previously expressed, the gay sensibility is not synonymous with camp, but it offers a perspective that gives reason to the qualities that construct camp. Thus, interpreting queerness in and inviting queer fans to certain texts better prepares its transformation

into a camp artifact. Audiences' identification of queerness in the *Wicked* franchise can not only be traced back to the musical but also to the novel that inspired it.

Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, reimagines L. Frank Baum's novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), the source material of the 1939 film adaptation. Maguire expands upon the backstory of the two witches who served to enhance Dorothy's story. Playing upon Baum's name, he named the Wicked Witch Elphaba and sought to investigate her origins and narratives of evil in a setting influenced by the 1990s' political climate. Eight years after its publication, the novel inspired the stage musical, leading to the film adaptations. Compared to Baum's novel and the *Wicked* adaptations, Maguire's novel contains more mature themes, portraying more salient instances of violence and sexuality. In an interview with LGBTQ+ publication *Them*, Maguire explains that crafting a universe with various political standings, faiths, and "sexual orientation and sexual diversity" is essential to develop a complex world and characters that compare to reality. Explicit and ambiguous descriptions of Elphaba's body demonstrate a sexual diversity, though it's met with prejudice as other characters critically gossip about her identity. Dorothy and her friends exchange "transvestigator-leaning hearsay" (Factora) and even speculate about her sexual orientation, claiming that she is "a woman who prefers the company of other women" (Maguire, 12) to explain her wickedness. Maguire admits that he does "sow the seeds of" an intersex or transgender interpretation of Elphaba, which fans have noticed. Additionally, Elphaba and Glinda "share a kiss" in the novel, so in response to being asked about their "sapphic tension" in the film, Maguire reveals, "That was intentional." During the interview, he even suggests the possibility that "the girls had sex in the bed on the way to the Emerald City," as he intended to write about the witches' relationship potential rather than certainty. Furthermore, Maguire

confirms the parallel that people have drawn between a tiger character falling ill and the AIDS crisis. As a gay man, he uses his description of Elphaba tending to the dying to acknowledge his community's experience in the 1990s. As Oz's political turmoil is inspired by real conflicts, this parallel inserts a grim reality into a seemingly "magic land where troubles melt like lemon drops" (Rodriguez). Evidently, *Wicked* is a novel teeming with explicit and implied LGBTQ+ themes, which seems unexpected when compared to the adaptations that dial it down. Nevertheless, the stage musical illustrates queerness in the show's structure rather than content.

In "'Defying Gravity': Queer Conventions in the Musical 'Wicked,'" Stacy Wolf examines the stage musical's construction to demonstrate how Glinda and Elphaba's pairing intentionally positions them as a queer primary couple. She doesn't argue to label them with a specific sexual orientation, but rather, she illustrates their queerness as a same-sex modification of musical theater narrative conventions, purposefully orchestrated by the composer. Queerness in *Wicked* (Schwartz, 2003) is defined by a rejection of heterosexual pairing while following musical theatre traditions and symbology through centering a female couple. While other musicals may be read through a queer interpretation, *Wicked* "aligns with the musical's 'preferred' reading," (5) meaning audiences would have to utilize a subversive lens to achieve the straight reading. According to the aims and methods of Stephen Schwartz, the composer and lyricist of *Wicked*, Glinda and Elphaba were intentionally written as a same-sex pairing that parallels canonical heterosexual romance and abides by Rodgers and Hammerstein's theater customs, such as having a lead's romance define the musical's story. Within the primary couple, both characters are first established as incompatible, for their eventual relationship is designed "to stand in for the unification of problematic differences in American culture" (9). In a heterosexual pairing, these differences are typically credited to gender, so *Wicked* illustrates

Elphaba's difference as her green skin color. The existence of Dr. Dillamond and the class of Animals symbolizes a racialized Other, whereas Nessarose depicts a disabled Other, making Elphaba's physical difference purely symbolic, as it stands for her independence and political progressiveness. As a result, it perfectly contrasts Glinda's conventional appearance and political indifference.

The witches' introductory songs similarly contrast. In high soprano, Glinda introduces her relationship to Elphaba "in language that underlines its queerness," as her untruthful confession that they only briefly met at school suggests that their bond was "intimate and illicit... [playing] out a double entendre," (12). The musical is full of double meaning, offering opportunities to expand upon hints of queerness. Meanwhile, a few semitones lower, Elphaba's opening number, "The Wizard and I," is honest and full of drive. Musical duets emphasize the relationship of the principal characters; in *Wicked*, the number is "unusually high for any romantic couple in a musical" (13). The witches' first duet, "What Is This Feeling?", purposefully plays on the romantic conventions of musical theatre. The song begins with physiological symptoms of falling in love—"My pulse is rushing / My head is reeling" (Schwartz)—then subverts the expectation of a love song, "[setting] up the audience to be teased by queer potential throughout the show," (13). However, according to Schwartz's intention, the song is meant to function like "Ten Minutes Ago" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, which expresses love at first sight. Along with the choreography of Elphaba and Glinda twirling close to and dashing away from each other, the number indicates how they "at once hate each other and are irresistibly drawn to each other," (14) resembling the dynamic of many musical theatre couples. Later, when each character is at the Ozdust ballroom, Glinda approaches Elphaba, who is ostracized on the dance floor. Like Maria and Tony's gym scene in Arthur

Laurents's *West Side Story*, "everyone else fades into the background" and they "speak their own choreographed language" (14). Glinda and Elphaba are united by an unvoiced quality, reflecting how connections can form through esoteric means, much like the online communities that follow the franchise. Their unspoken language allows room for fans to insert their own meaning, which expands upon the queerness that Schwartz had intentionally planted. Many songs also have the potential to be adopted as queer anthems, as they voice pursuits for acceptance and belonging, explaining the phenomenon that Gilchrist witnessed with "Defying Gravity," for various fans do "hold space" for lyrics about embracing power and individuality despite societal limitations.

Two decades after the stage musical, the movie adaptation encompasses queerness in its cast and discourse, and unites a queer following in a different way. A large portion of the leading cast publicly identifies as queer, including Erivo, Jonathan Bailey, Marissa Bode, and Bowen Yang. Bailey portrays Fiyero Tigelaar, the love interest of both witches, though his romance with each of them gets narratively sidelined by the leading characters' relationship. What's more, Yang, who plays Glinda's friend Pfannee, says that Fiyero "gives an unspoken bisexual energy" (Rude) in the podcast *Las Culturistas*. Even the Cowardly Lion is voiced by another gay-identified actor, Colman Domingo. Knowing that Bailey's role as Fiyero Tigelaar becomes the Scarecrow that accompanies Dorothy alongside the Cowardly Lion, the cast brings into fruition the "camp allusion" (Harris, 20) of being friends with Dorothy. The phrase is commonly associated with the quintessence of gay culture, Judy Garland, and her farmgirl character; it became a passcode to subtly signal one's queerness to those who could decipher it, reflecting the level of understanding that is necessary to participate in its surrounding culture. Furthermore, Grande's starring role brings her fandom, which has a large gay male component, to the *Wicked*

franchise, uniting fans of her music with fans of the musical. The union of male Arianators with female fans of *Wicked* gathers under the banner of *Wicked*, positioning the movies as ally texts.

To different fans, Glinda and Elphaba's deep connection may appear as a devoted platonic female friendship and/or a queer romantic relationship, as neither novel, musical, nor film definitively confirms it. However, because the latter interpretation is supported by many queer-coded elements, fans expand upon the witches' connection online, as some social media accounts are dedicated to expressing their slash shipping, romantic or sexual pairings between same-sex characters, or headcanons, interpretations of a fictional character that aren't confirmed by the original source material. One account on X utilizes the display name, "lesbian glinda truther" (@elphieupland), another goes by "@lesbianzgrande," where their profile banner is a cutout of Glinda and Elphaba against a backdrop of lockers from *Bottoms* (Seligman, 2023), a comedy movie about two gay girls starting a feminist fight club to win the attention of their crushes. This account incorporates other queer and camp media references to discuss *Wicked*'s witches, continuing the endeavor of multimedia layering. One post uses a GIF of a *SATC* character's emotional outburst to comment upon Glinda's plights, but a majority of their posts emphasize the witches' certain romance, calling them "girlfriends" and "soulmates". Within the *Wicked* fandom, even beyond self-identified fan accounts, many users refer to the character as "gaylinda," while they alternate similar nicknames for Elphaba. These users take screenshots from the musical or movie to explicitly bestow lesbian labels onto the characters, naming what is hinted at in the franchise's texts.

The *Wicked* movies bolster these elements, but they also offer fans a few more details in which to interpret queerness. On X, users refer to the background of *Wicked: For Good's* (Chu, 2025) opening as "lesbian tulips," as it pans across a gradient of orange, white, and magenta

tulips. The second movie also visually and temporally parallels Glinda walking down the aisle with Elphaba while uncovering caged animals. Users such as Emily (@dykeslayage) and Jess (@jamjoob) see this symbolization of entrapment and illusion as reason to believe in Glinda's lesbian identity. Under Emily's post, Jess comments, "The concept of Glinda finding marrying a man just as scary as Elphaba finding the caged Animals." Jess's subtle reference to the aforementioned Erivo thinking GIF reveals the intermingling of *Wicked* with the online culture it has created, demonstrating its language's pervasiveness. Even Grande posted about Glinda's sexuality through a meme about Glinda and Fiyero (Figure 10) that reads: "She's A Lesbian, He's Gay, And Their 33-Year Marriage Will Change Your Perception Of Love," which derives from an old article headline. In other interviews and panels, Grande frequently reiterates that Glinda is closeted. During an interview with the LGBTQ+ magazine *Gay Times*, Grande and Erivo claim that each day in Oz is a "pride parade." Grande calls Dr. Dillamond a "gay icon," as well as his Animal friends, and imitates the *SATC* character that one of them sounds like. When the interviewer brings up fans' shipping of the two witches, Erivo admits understanding its potential,

as their relationship is a "deep connection" and "true love" (Erivo). Grande adds that "Glinda might be a little in the closet, but... [g]ive it a little more time" (Grande). Though she reveals nothing explicitly queer in the movie, the actress reveals her intention in playing the character.



Figure 10: Ariana Grande posts about Glinda's sexuality (Instagram, @arianagrande, December 7, 2024).

These examples demonstrate a multilayering inspired by the gay sensibility, which primes a text for camp reception.

The second movie, *Wicked: For Good*, may have diminished the buzz created by the first's press tour, but it compensates for its lack of camp moments and comedic relief with emotional weight as political strife and corruption paint a darker tone. The online content made in response to the sequel is focused on the queer potential emboldened by the witches' deeper relationship and star-crossed ending. Bittersweet flashback scenes showing when their friendship was simple, or Glinda unlocking the Grimmerie only when she wistfully looks towards Elphaba's image in a split frame, provide opportunities to comment upon their doomed relationship or make video edits of the ship. Social media users' shipping posts made in relation to the second movie are generally more serious, with some exceptions poking fun at the characters' humorous tiff as they dramatically go head to head at the site of the Wicked Witch of the East's (Nessa's) death. Still, Glinda carries the role of the comedic relief, counterbalancing the burdens that Elphaba has to carry as the framed fugitive. The former's one-liners are reminiscent of Old Hollywood's critical quips as she impatiently deals with Dorothy's plight—"Ugh, I swear it never ends with that girl," (*Wicked: For Good* 1:57:47). In the first movie, Glinda's persona is more vibrant, theatrical, and self-absorbed, portraying the witty snark or "bitchiness" that is aligned with camp attitudes. Nevertheless, while their contrasting personalities, styles, and attitudes indicate an interesting relationship dynamic, or like in the stage musical, portray them as a couple and offer fans rich shipping potential, it also conveys a campy incongruity, with an extreme comedy and gravity at each end.

In a similar fashion to coincidentally colored tulip fields, the Gilchrist interview displays another queer-coded image. The image that succinctly represents the interview features Grande's

poised palm curved around Erivo's long finger, which is a pose that is unnatural to form and also intimate to witness. A camp eye can easily interpret a double meaning and exaggerate the sexuality of the pose. Moreover, some users extend their shipping to the actresses, whether it's through posts akin to "gelphie" (Glinda and Elphaba's ship name) content, or by spreading the satirical meme that Grande and Erivo are in a "non-demi-curious semi-binary relationship" (NDTV Lifestyle). This rumor originated from a satirical pop culture Facebook page, but some users genuinely believed it, recognizing queer possibility in their close bond. Ultimately, through each piece of the franchise, numerous elements provide either explicit queer representation or queer subtext, equipping fans with a foundation upon which to build content and imbue with personal meaning. To reiterate, it's not essential for a text to be explicitly queer to transform into something camp, but a gay sensibility offers a specific worldview that shapes how texts are perceived. It functions upon similar hallmarks, such as double meaning, which is essential to rejecting a dominant reading and constructing original content. The online culture involving *Wicked* contrasts with other Internet humor, as a queer sensibility helps to identify qualities that make the franchise and its promotion a camp object.

Expanding the Image of the Arbiter

Camp is typically pictured to have a specific audience, as it "is just about the only style, language and culture that is distinctively and unambiguously gay male" (Dyer, 49). However, the sensibility outlines a singular, homogenous way of being gay. Excessive, theatrical camp images can "be very exclusive for someone who isn't a queen" (Dyer, 50), let alone anybody else who identifies outside of the male gay identity. In the previous section, the headcanons shared online may be reflections of their creator, as a majority of these accounts present themselves with female pronouns, feminine names, and sapphic identities. Throughout their content, they flaunt a

fluency in online camp references, actively contributing to the development of an online culture. This female-centered fandom and feminine-presenting demographic expands upon the traditional image of the camp arbiter. Nonetheless, the number of anonymous accounts broadens the audience further, reinventing the expectation of camp practitioners. Numerous accounts go by arbitrary or referential names, often mixtures of different media that reflect their multi-fandom content or commentary. For instance, X user @wandasattorney's username references Marvel's *Wandavision*, about which they post content alongside their *Wicked* press tour commentary, turning each post into an amalgamation of media. Some accounts that engage with *Wicked* partake in other pieces of media that don't typically reflect a camp taste or gay sensibility, rather only a female fandom, such as Taylor Swift, while others demonstrate more classic interests, like Judy Garland. Just as some accounts label each category of their profile, many omit any form of identification, obscuring any personal information. What characterizes these accounts is the content that they share, revealing that the camp culture constructed through social media places a larger emphasis on canon and reception than on a unity of marginalized identity. The audience is essential to the camp sensibility, but their value derives from their ability to identify campness, build upon it, and communicate with each other through certain texts and language. Similar identities may produce a feeling of belonging and complement the gay sensibility that informs camp, but it's not necessary to sustain an esoteric culture of creation and understanding.

With the use of profile names, social media can exemplify who participates in an online camp culture, but only if they represent the user's real-life persona. Otherwise, the arbiters of online camp may remain anonymous, being represented by the content they engage with instead. Without physical walls and personal differences, social media emphasizes the significance of tacit knowledge and understanding in what is first and foremost a reception practice. In other

words, this doesn't mean that online camp is completely available to the public and thus susceptible to mainstream dilution, as a plethora of content fails to evoke the campness produced around *Wicked*. Notably, a significant portion of commentary on *Wicked* is mere parody, lacking a camp essence, whereas some reflect unartistic hate trains, whether on the franchise or the lead actresses. Dyer explains that "[s]o much depends on what you feel about men and women, about sex, about being gay," (51) because a problematic attitude can only lead to a problematic behavior and culture, which corrupts the foundation of a camp community. It lays the distinction between admiring and mocking femininity, which is a central debate within the sensibility. Unadorned critique is simply criticism, and it contains no potential to transform into circulated meaningful content. Without a physical presence, social media looks over the physical, personal, or local distinctions that usually encourage community building, thus supporting a culture that is primarily united by members who are able to interpret its linguistic and visual codes.

Revisiting and Redefining Camp Canon

With the online culture that *Wicked*'s franchise and promotion has encouraged, it provides users a new vocabulary with which to revisit other texts. At the same time, it points out a camp style of meme remixing that users have applied to related texts. The older the text, the more prominent the incongruity, and thus, the more camp. In "Uses of Camp," Ross asserts that the camp effect is created "when the products... of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to produce and dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste" (312). As shown through the vintage styles that Erivo and Grande have worn throughout the press tour, what was once typical now stands out, offering potential to transform them into camp objects. The actresses' style may be instances of anachronistic camp glamour, but social media users prove Ross's words by treating

old texts with contemporary meaning. Throughout the following posts, social media users recontextualize *The Wizard of Oz*, viewing the 1939 film in a 21st-century discourse using modern language. As an established piece of camp canon, it's not new to revisit the text and observe campness in its outdated special effects, but social media reveals a contemporary way to build upon camp texts. In an X post that shows Dorothy's house on top of a pair of striped stockings and ruby slippers, Hailey (@nobodynoswift) writes, "the original slay the house down boots I'm deceased." Hailey's use of Black queer ballroom community slang stands in contrast to the nearly ninety-year-old film. Certain phrases from these dialects have been repeated throughout different social media platforms, contributing to their mainstream absorption, where their use evokes humor when used in inappropriate settings. As a result, it sets up the contradiction that camp thrives upon — an incongruity between the serious, namely the Wicked Witch of the East's pictured death, and the humorous, a modern and inappropriately utilized phrase. Other posts may reference the film through creative captions rather than direct screencaps, inserting an unassociated meme or reaction image that is available for numerous interpretations and use. X user MrsFishVEVO (@Will_Kellogg) exhibits a screenshot of Ra'Jah O'Hara from *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-), where the pictured queen conveys a wide-eyed look of concern as she is adorned by plastic leaves and branches (Figure 11). The image is accompanied by the caption, "The apple trees in The Wizard of Oz when Dorothy starts picking apples." The humor from this post stems from the anachronistic effect and



Figure 11: MrsFishVEVO remixes contemporary references with the old movie (X, @Will_Kellogg, July 3, 2021).

11). The image is accompanied by the caption, "The apple trees in The Wizard of Oz when Dorothy starts picking apples." The humor from this post stems from the anachronistic effect and

a hyperspecificity, as its caption and image are too specific, unique, and intertwined to evoke anything else. The application of this versatile image also emphasizes the active creation and remixing that occurs within the camp sensibility. What's more, as witnessed in a variety of *Wicked* memes, the layering of media—*Drag Race*—contributes to the camp effect. Camp anachronistic effects can also derive from conversations that are unique to more recent decades, as X user “popular loner” (@milkyy_tweets) instills a contemporary trend onto a character from *The Wizard of Oz*. The post's image shows the man who let Dorothy's posse into the Emerald City, but he appears mid-sentence with a tight mouth, round cheeks, and a puffy chin. The caption reads, “His filler is a mess.” Since an actor from the 1930s could not have botched fillers or cosmetic work, the incongruity is comical. Regardless, the user plays upon both a temporal incongruity and the excess that fascinates the camp sensibility. A cosmetically overfilled look surpasses mainstream beauty standards and tips into an exaggerated image. When users apply modern language and 21st-century references to the 1939 film, the result typically exhibits a camp effect when paired with elements such as theatricality and excessiveness. The popularity of *Wicked* being received as a camp text helps uncover the same sense of humor used with other online texts, revealing the components of the online canon and sensibility. As opposed to *The Wizard of Oz*, which has long been embraced in camp culture, *Wicked* specifically reveals a camp culture that originates online.

Conclusion

Wicked's reception online demonstrates a new way to handle texts that exude a camp effect. More importantly, while the original material contains camp humor and aesthetics, social media users' engagement and creation are what actively construct a camp culture around the text, incorporating it into the broader online canon. Their circulation of clips, images, and GIFs from

the franchise and its press tour emphasizes the power of the camp practitioner to develop something into an entire set of images and language, which results in excluding those who aren't fluent. Nevertheless, users' ignorance or misunderstanding illustrates the peripherality of the online camp culture. This difference in comprehension compares to that of the gay sensibility, which inspires the most crucial elements of camp. *Wicked* has a history of queerness, with its inspirational novel including LGBTQ+ themes, the musical intentionally queer-coding its lead female couple, and the film's cast portraying its characters with queer identities. In recognition of this queer potential, fans ship the lead characters, making content that positions *Wicked* as a queer text. These accounts' activity, which aligns with the camp reception around *Wicked*, points out a wider variety of camp practitioners, for many possess female-presenting or anonymous profiles, expanding the familiar camp audience of gay men. Seeing how users react to *Wicked* and translate the camp sensibility online, similar posts about other texts appear as part of the online camp practice too. Posts like MrsFishVevo's that remix *RuPaul's Drag Race* exhibit a unique way to revisit texts, even combining canonical camp texts, such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Drag Race*. This revisitation supports the idea that online camp culture is a new evolution of the sensibility, brought about by social media.

Camp practitioners are responsible for sustaining the sensibility, but social media facilitates the creation of a new camp culture, for it has all the essential tools. Platforms' like, share, comment, and repost mechanisms encourage the circulation of texts and addition of meaning, strengthening the culture's esoteric language. The existence of GIFs provides accessible ways to participate in this language, conduct multimedia remixing, and illustrate incongruities through their design. Images and quotes can quickly trend and reach viral status, as they're easy to disperse across platforms, inviting new members to participate in the camp

culture. Because of the encouragement and ease of creating and sharing on social media, the reception practice of camp thrives. Through trending language and humor, it trains new audiences to indulge in the camp sensibility. Though the online culture is more accessible and inclusive than the traditional one, it still draws boundaries around a knowledgeable community, as users must interpret the meaning of its esoteric language to keep up and participate. Some of the posts shown originate from 2026, years after the first *Wicked*. Users' continued use of the language that derives from *Wicked*'s peak exemplifies the endurance of online camp culture, disproving the fact that it is simply a trend. As mainstream audiences move on from the *Wicked* press tour, camp practitioners remain utilizing its language and images, keeping the text in store to remix it with media to come or revisit.

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