
A Study Of The Evil Western Witches In Victor Fleming Movie The Wizard Of Oz

Not All Bad Witches Are Ugly

In the film *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Victor Fleming and based on the story and universe created by L. Frank Baum, the viewer follows the journey of Dorothy through the Land of Oz. During this journey, Dorothy encounters witches, Munchkins, a wizard, and of course, lions, tigers, and bears. The main plot of the story is found in the battle between Dorothy and the Wicked Witch of the West, whose real name is Elphaba. Throughout the story, Dorothy, and most of Oz, is under the assumption that the Wicked Witch is the definition of wicked, but this may not be the case. In fact, the Wicked Witch of the West may even be less wicked than The Wizard or Glinda the Good Witch.

The story of *The Wizard of Oz* goes beyond this movie, especially with the Broadway musical *Wicked*, adapted from Baum's novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. In order to fully appreciate and understand *The Wizard of Oz*, it is important to know the story of *Wicked*. In this story, the Wicked Witch of the West, referred to as Elphaba, "Born an unnatural shade of green due to the dalliances of her mother, Elphaba is misunderstood and ostracized, particularly when enrolling in a boarding school for aspiring Witches and Wizards (Shiz Academy)". During her time there, she befriends Galinda, who eventually becomes Glinda the Good Witch. Galinda convinces Elphaba to travel to the Emerald City, because it is not just Dorothy who has high hopes to meet the Wizard of Oz. Elphaba feels as though her true calling is to work side-by-side with the "great and powerful" Wizard. A shift starts to begin when Elphaba discovers that the talking animals from Oz are beginning to lose their ability to speak, forcing them to become more traditional animals with no relationships with humans. Elphaba, stricken with worry, brings this up to the Wizard, only to discover that it is the not-so-powerful Wizard who is behind the silencing of the animals. It is at this fork in the story that Glinda and Elphaba decide which path to follow. Elphaba decides to rebel against the Wizard, rejecting his plans for Oz, and goes out on her own. However, Glinda decides to stay with the Wizard and be his right-hand witch, despite her strong friendship with Elphaba.

Once Elphaba goes against the Wizard, the people of Oz declare her as wicked, and Glinda is placed into the role of the good witch. However, "Glinda knows the truth and continues a clandestine relationship with her friend" (Howell). Glinda even questions her choice to stay with the Wizard. As time passes, the story of the Wicked Witch is twisted and she truly is made out to be an evil witch, despite her original reason for rebelling being evidently justified with her compassion for the animals of Oz. Into the story comes Dorothy, with her house crashing down into Munchkin Land, killing Elphaba's sister, the Wicked Witch of the East. Glinda arrives to speak with Dorothy, who explains to Dorothy the existence of evil and good witches, labeling the two sisters as "wicked", despite knowing the truth about Elphaba's character. Also, Glinda includes her logic that "only bad witches are ugly", implying somehow ugly people cannot be good. Dorothy believes Glinda, without any skepticism or attempt to understand the so-called "wicked" witches. Quickly, Elphaba arrives to figure out who has killed her beloved sister. Glinda taunts Elphaba, despite Elphaba grieving, and gives Dorothy the ruby red slippers. Elphaba becomes greatly upset, because she wanted her sister's slippers, possibly to

remember her by. Glinda then tells Dorothy that her only way to get home is by going to the Wizard, who Glinda already knows has no real powers. Also, Glinda already knows of another way to get Dorothy home, but instead sends her on this journey down the yellow brick road, which were directions given to Dorothy while Glinda refused to answer any more of Dorothy's questions about getting to the Emerald City. This journey also includes leaving Munchkin Land, where coincidentally, the Wicked Witch has no powers. Instead of keeping Dorothy safe and saving a lot of skipping, Glinda sends her off. If Glinda really was good, she should have accompanied Dorothy through more than just looking over her in the sky, or she could have saved the Dorothy the trouble and told her how to get home as soon as she could. Instead, Glinda starts the feud and puts Dorothy in harm's way.

Along with having no control over where her house landed, Dorothy also has no control or say when Glinda started this feud between Elphaba and Dorothy. Glinda is the one who put the ruby red slippers onto Dorothy, and Glinda is the one who pitted Elphaba against Dorothy. It is important to keep in mind that Glinda is manipulating a child, for what very well may be her own gain. Dorothy leaves on her journey to the Emerald City, and she makes friends with the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion. During their time on the yellow brick road, there are various encounters with the Wicked Witch, all of which Glinda the Good Witch is watching occur, intervening only once. Again, she is the one who sent Dorothy on this trip. The group somehow reaches the Emerald City without too much harm done to them. The four finally reach the Wizard after the citizens of Emerald City celebrate Dorothy for killing the Wicked Witch of the East, which she really did not mean to do. When the four make their requests to the Wizard, he informs them he cannot help them until he returns with Elphaba's broomstick. The Scarecrow mentions how the only way of accomplishing this is by killing the Wicked Witch, so now Dorothy is manipulated into killing Elphaba.

Dorothy's new position against the Wicked Witch, set up by Oz, also reflects the evil nature of Oz himself. As mentioned previously, Oz kept animals from continuing to be able to speak, took part in this whole charade about how Elphaba is supposedly "wicked", and has now preyed on the desperation of four individuals to carry out this vendetta he has for Elphaba for rebelling against him. Oz knows the whole time that he is powerless; this is represented through his big front of smoke, a false projection of who he probably wishes he could be, and manipulation of his voice. When the four first came to the Wizard, he spoke down to them, creating fear in them, which was obvious by their trembling and inability to properly explain why they had come to him. Ultimately, the four do go retrieve the broom of the Wicked Witch, but not without melting her with a bucket of water. When they return to the Wizard, he explains how he has no power. The Tin Man always had a heart. The Scarecrow always had a brain. The Lion always had courage. However, he could not really help Dorothy. It is Glinda who explains to Dorothy how to get home, by saying she was able to go home the whole time by clicking her heels three times and saying "There's no place like home." Dorothy questions why she was not told this from the start, but Glinda responds with that she had to figure it out for herself. Yet Glinda even just told her how to do it; Dorothy had no idea. Also, it is not the case that Dorothy had to realize how important to her home was; she already figured that out by the time she met Glinda. Instead of just telling Dorothy to click her stolen heels, Glinda sent her on this ridiculous trip that put her and others in danger, but it ultimately benefited Glinda. But apparently Glinda is beautiful, and only bad witches are ugly, so it must be okay.

Yet, Elphaba's green skin has her labeled as "ugly", and therefore a bad witch. Dorothy, with her perfectly picked outfit and pigtails with her fair skin, shows how child-like she is, and

therefore, gullible. Dorothy believes the “wicked” label Glinda gives Elphaba without question of why she is that way, if she even truly is that way at all. The Munchkins also might represent a child-like state; the small stature and high-pitched voices may have been picked to represent their naïve and gullible side as well. Although Elphaba did indeed bully the four travelers, it is important to look at the situation from her perspective. Elphaba has been spending her life fighting the injustices of Oz, cast out and labeled as “wicked”. Being a loner, family is vital, so of course she is going to become enraged when her sister, who she spent much time helping for a long time, is killed and her pair of ruby, red slippers are given to the girl whose house fell on her. Her anger is understandable, and any sane family member would feel the same frustration. Elphaba’s approach to injustice makes sense, because “Elphaba refuses to accept the distinction between hot and cold anger, realizing that having both is the strongest way to be” . If Elphaba simply protested the injustices, she would get nowhere because she is on her own. Instead, defying gravity, she has set out on her own to fight for what she believes to be just, which requires a great deal of theatrics, shallow threats, and the occasional cackling to add to the illusion that she is a huge threat. The film uses dark colors to represent this assumed evil, through red smoke, black clothes, and green skin.

Although Elphaba’s tactics are a bit scary at times, especially if you are a child like Dorothy, they are not entirely unjustified. What is unjustified though Glinda’s and the Wizard’s ways of dealing with the Wicked Witch’s rebellion. Glinda puts a lost, young girl in harm’s way, lies to her, intervenes very little, pits her against an insanely powerful and angry force, and brushes it all off. The Wizard lies about his abilities, uses fear to gain respect, preys on desperation and the hopeful nature of the four travelers, and then does not deliver on his promises. Coincidentally, the Wizard’s theatrics are similar to that of the Wicked Witch’s, but they are presented with a more “grand” tone in the film rather than evil. Elphaba is what democrats are to republicans; it’s merely a political feud with unsupported labels thrown around, placing others in harm’s way as a result. Glinda, despite all of her pink and glitter, is very much guilty of being evil, manipulative, and selfish. The Oz also cannot escape the reality that he is also evil, despite his way with words and well-designed theatrics. Elphaba’s errors does not even touch those of the Wizard and Glinda.