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How is a (Wicked) Witch created? Oppression and Empowerment in the Land of Oz

Celia Ferrero Sánchez

Tutora: Marta María Gutiérrez Rodríguez

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

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ABSTRACT

Beyond her role as an iconic horror figure, the witch functions as a powerful archetype historically shaped by fear and power, revealing the structural faults of the patriarchy. This undergraduate dissertation aims to explore her presence in American cinema to better understand her enthralling nature, with particular focus on one of its most important characters, the infamous Wicked Witch of the West. Employing feminist studies—including Julia Kristeva's abjection and Barbara Creed's Monstrous Feminine—as theoretical frameworks, the study traces an outline of the witch's evolution across cinematographic history to critically examine her complexity. The findings of this research reveal that Elphaba embodies not a singular archetype, but rather an amalgamation of different and intersecting identities, each reflecting a different stage of defiance and revolution. Through this in-depth investigation, this dissertation contributes to the extensive repository of feminist studies about a traditionally gendered character, capable of being a progressive figure.

Key words: Witch, Cinema, Abjection, *Wicked*, Feminism, Monstrous Feminine.

RESUMEN

Más allá de su rol como figura icónica del terror, la bruja funciona como un poderoso arquetipo cultural históricamente definido por el miedo y el poder, revelando los fallos estructurales del sistema patriarcal. Este trabajo de fin de grado busca explorar su presencia en el cine estadounidense para comprender mejor su naturaleza cautivadora, con especial atención a uno de sus personajes más importantes: la infame bruja mala del oeste. Empleando estudios feministas—incluyendo la abyección de Julia Kristeva y el monstruo femenino de Barbara Creed—como marcos teóricos, el estudio traza un esquema de la evolución de la bruja a lo largo de la historia cinematográfica para examinar críticamente su complejidad. Los hallazgos de esta investigación revelan que Elphaba no encarna un solo arquetipo, sino una amalgama de identidades diferentes e interrelacionadas, cada una reflejando una etapa distinta de desafío y revolución. A través de esta profunda investigación, esta tesis contribuye al extenso repertorio de estudios feministas sobre un personaje tradicionalmente definido por el género, capaz de ser una figura progresista.

Palabras clave: Bruja, Cine, Abyección, *Wicked*, Feminismo, Monstruo Femenino.

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INTRODUCTION

The witch constitutes one of the most compelling and enduring archetypes in popular culture, whether represented in literature or in cinema, her presence exerts a distinctive influence upon the beholder. Beyond her central role in numerous narratives across a myriad of genres, her construction always merits critical analysis, for she has evolved in tandem with the sociocultural contexts in which she is produced. The witch has always served as the symbolic repository for the anxieties and fears of the patriarchy. Nonetheless, recent feminist movements took the opportunity of reclaiming the witch from an empowering perspective; once a label imposed upon women, it has increasingly become a symbol willingly embraced. This shift has, evidently, been reflected across both literary and cinematic media.

Her earliest representations in fiction emerged in literature, with witches such as Circe or Medea. However, it is her portrayal in cinema that constitutes the focus of this undergraduate dissertation. From an accused woman, to a wild one, to the fantasy crone, or the vamp, this iconic figure has been explored thoroughly in many narratives. However, one of the most notorious witches in cinematic history is The Wicked Witch of the West, from the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. The Wicked Witch, who has long instilled great fear as well as admiration and curiosity, has an evilness never explained, until *Wicked*. *Wicked* disrupts this convention by offering the backstory of Elphaba, trying to explain the context of the events depicted in the original 1939 film, and why the Wicked Witch came to be perceived as such. By applying the evolution of her figure in American cinema to *Wicked*, a compelling analysis can be posed to the construction of Elphaba's identity, tracing her development from birth through all the different circumstances that culminated in her embodiment of such figure.

Taking the studies from authors like Heather Greene, Diane Purkiss, Julia Kristeva, or Barbara Creed as theoretical framework, this dissertation aims to present an accurate depiction of such a nuanced figure. Beginning with a historical overview of the witch, this study proceeds to analyze her depictions in literature, identifying some of the most emblematic examples — including the Three Witches from *Macbeth* and the White Witch from *The Chronicles of Narnia*. From this literary foundation, the dissertation transitions to film media, with an in-depth research of iconic witches such as Carrie White and the Evil Queen from *Snow White*. The study then engages with the theoretical frameworks of abjection and othering, and the monstrous feminine, essential studies to understanding the complex archetype of the witch. Finally, drawing upon these layers of analysis, the final section centers around the examination

of the character of Elphaba, considering all the different forces that created her, whether cultural, narrative or symbolic.

1. THROUGH THE WITCHES' LENS: ANALYZING THE WITCH IN CULTURE

1.1. The Witch Across History

The witch has been the subject of extensive study by many scholars for she is a compelling figure, whose evolution reflects the ever-changing dynamics of the society in which she exists. For example, Heather Greene in her book *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft* (2021), delves into this evolution, stating that “the witch archetype exists in two modes: one of oppression and one of empowerment” (Greene 15). This dichotomy is central for the figure of the witch, as she has always been a marker of the anxieties and tensions within society; however, over time, she has turned into something much bigger. Greene also reflects on how the witch occupies “a liminal space”, where she has functioned inside that dichotomy mentioned above, embodying pure contradiction. Nonetheless, she has consistently served as a powerful symbol of belief systems and cultural momentum, evoking both fear and admiration (16).

In 2023, Brydie Kosmina published a book called *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch*, which focuses on analyzing the historical connotations of witchcraft and Wiccan practices and examine how contemporary activist movements have contributed to transforming their perception. She also asserts that, traditionally, being denominated a witch was nearly equivalent to receiving a death sentence. It has always been imposed upon individuals as a form of punishment, and it was never embraced as a positive identity until very recently (1). However, Kosmina explains that following the 2016 U.S presidential election and the infamous campaign against Hillary Clinton —led by the use of the term “witch” as a derogatory label— there was a resurgence of media with the witch as central figure. Films, television shows, literature, and other media, began portraying stories of powerful witches, demonstrating that the term used for denigrating women, can also embody tremendous strength (18).

Furthermore, delving into the concept of the witch as a positive figure, Diane Purkiss, in her book *The Witch in History* (1996), argues that the witch has transcended her role as a mere construct of the patriarchy, noting that women have also employed it “as a fantasy which allowed them to express and manage otherwise unspeakable fears and desires” (Purkiss 2). The witch gradually became a scapegoat, a means for women to express themselves when such expression was forbidden. It was reshaped into a positive symbol for women, who “used the opportunity of supernatural agency and confession to shape an identity for themselves” (Purkiss 2).

What is clear is that the witch is a culturally significant figure, one that represents far more than what it may appear at first, and with a deeper meaning as well. She stands as a powerful symbol of the cultural and ideological shifts society has undergone over time. Once associated with fear and marginalization, she has come to be redefined as an emblem of autonomy, strength, and feminine power.

1.2. What Being a Witch Entails

As introduced above, the figure of the witch has suffered a huge evolution throughout history, from denominating women who had knowledge about herbology and healing, to being demonized. This change was prompted in the early modern period by an Act passed—The first English witchcraft Act—in 1542, as Julie Mathias details in the article “Introduction to English Witches in the Early Modern Period”. Nonetheless as explained by Anne Kwaschik, from the decade of the 70s, or even before, a new representation has appeared. The feminist movement has “appropriated” the figure of the witch and has resignified it as a figure of empowerment (Kwaschik 171). However, even though there has been an evolution, society should not forget all the victims affected by the persecutions that took place, whether suffering only rejection, or the ultimate death. Either in popular culture or in literature, the witch has always been a very nuanced figure. Being used as a feminist icon or, on the contrary, to undermine the achievements of political rivals, it has repeatedly been the spark of controversies and discussions.

Diane Purkiss examines in her book, the very first women who were considered witches. She digs into how incorrect the perception of “ancient” witches in society is, as the myth of the “witch hunt” has been wildly spread but it is also wildly incorrect. Purkiss explains that:

Some women are still so attached to the story that they resist efforts to disprove it. The myth has become important, not because of its historical truth, but because of its mythic significance. What is that significance? It is a story with clear oppositions. Everyone can tell who is innocent and who guilty, who is good and who bad, who is oppressed and who the oppressor (Purkiss 8).

It is true that women were accused and killed, so a “witch hunt” did occur, but not for the reasons this myth has led society to believe. She tells how that herbology knowledge they possessed was usually applied in conjunction with other household skills the woman already had, and how midwives were not only not accused, but usually sided with the “witch-hunters”. Purkiss also states that in places in which religion was more controlling of the citizens (Spain with the Inquisition, for instance) the terrible hunt we have been told that took place, usually

compared to nearly a holocaust, did not have the magnitude it is believed to have (8). It was, however, the feminist revolution who saw in the figure of the witch an opportunity to give a new meaning, that gave that disrupting, aggressive meaning, especially the organization WITCH, which stands for “Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell”, although its definition was altered over time (8-9). She states that “despite the disjunction between self and role implied by such flagrant theatricality, WITCH also inaugurated many of the myths of witchcraft which have become central to many radical feminists and most modern witches” (Purkiss 9). From this, one can assume that the figure of the witch existed and once referred to a very particular type of woman, but now it has been reappropriated and changed to fit different narratives and needs, so its meaning is far from what it once was.

Nowadays, witchcraft and the Wiccan movement have different presences around the world. According to Brydie Kosmina, in South Africa, the cultural practices related to spiritualism, which existed before the colonizers reached the country, were categorized as witchcraft, something that persisted until the present day, with an unfortunate growing rate of accusations and executions. Similarly, in Indonesia there are also persecutions and hunts for this exact reason. Kosima claims that “while these are only a very small number of contemporary examples of witchcraft beliefs and trials occurring contemporaneously, I mention these examples of ongoing witch hunts to demonstrate the vulnerabilities of being labelled a witch for already-marginalized people [...]” (Kosmina 36). So, the evolution of the witch towards something positive is not a globalized development, being pejorative still to certain groups of people.

1.3. The literary witch

Folklore and oral tales can be considered responsible for giving witches a bad reputation, which later developed in literary portrayals of abject women, as Barbara Creed discusses in her book *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), and that after much evolution, and feminist revolution, has led to what we know as a Witch nowadays.

According to Shahrukh Husain in the article “Las brujas y su poder mágico en la literatura de todo el mundo y épocas”, published in 2022, the first accounts of witches— or women who practiced witchcraft with a purpose— in literature appeared almost as literature in itself. There are numerous accounts, for example Lilith in *The Gilgamesh Epic*, Circe in *The Odyssey*, or even Medea. Anne M. DeLong details in her dissertation *Medea and Medusa: the Archetype of the Witch in Literature* (2001), how the literary witch is represented in two axes, and one of

them is based on Medea. She is a priestess of the goddess Hecate and is represented as a witch with the possession of a cauldron and knowledge about vegetation (14-15).

In continuation with Husain's article, she mentions, in Spanish literature, *La Celestina*, written by Fernando de Rojas in 1499, depicted as the traditional fantasy crone. In a more English fashion, Husain writes about the infamous Three Witches in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, published in 1623, perhaps some of the most well-known examples of the archetype. They are referred continuously (by Lady Macbeth, by Banquo, or by Macbeth himself) as "the weird sisters", and this could be an early representation of a coven in literature, however, the phenomenon was not properly named "coven" until 1921, when Margaret Murray used it in her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* ("coven" *Britannica*). They also heavily resemble the Fates or Moirai, female characters in various mythologies (such as the Greek or the Norse), although they are the personifications of destiny, not so much proper witches. The Three Witches know the weaknesses of the people they manipulate, and they are depicted as extremely powerful, and equally as evil.

Then, Husain mentions, in more recent times, the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum, published in 1900. She details how Dorothy is entrusted by the Wizard to kill the Witch to fulfill her wish, which is to return home. In this book there is a distinction between good witches and bad witches, as there is a Good Witch of the North that helps Dorothy, and a Wicked Witch of the West that tries to boycott her in her journey, and who is utterly defeated when Dorothy throws a bucket of water on her and she melts, meeting her death.

Furthermore, the character of the witch has also special relevance in children's literature, and there are many very well-known examples. An important instance mentioned by Husain comes in 1950, when C. S. Lewis publishes *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the first of *The Chronicles of Narnia* saga. Jadis is the main antagonist for the siblings, although she is commonly known as the White Witch. She rules over Narnia ruthlessly and has a range of powers—for instance telekinesis and the ability to control ice—that allow her to manipulate others at will. She does not fit the image of a sorceress as much, but she has immense power. Nonetheless, Sheldon Cashdan explains in his book *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales*, published in 1999, how traditional fairy tales were not created with children as their intended audience, and that is why they are vastly gruesome. Cashdan details that after being edited to appeal to more illiterate audiences, these tales resulted in being read by younger audiences and, in 1800, the Grimm brothers finally released their collection of fairy tales called *Children's and Household Tales* (6-7). The author explains that these fairy tales were not

popular amongst children because they had moral teachings, but because they are deep adventures filled with suspense that keep the reader on edge until the designated happy ending (10). This suspense may be reminiscent — to some extent— of the horror paradox. This paradox is widely found in many iconic characters of fairy tales, but especially in the character of the witch, for she produces an irksome reaction, nevertheless, she continues to draw significant attention, as Greene says in the introduction of *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft*, she is both harrowing and mesmerizing (14).

According to Filippo Contesi in his article “Carroll on the emotion of horror”, the horror paradox was popularized in the Anglo-Saxon sphere by Noël Carroll. He is an American philosopher that in 1990 published a book titled *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, in which he delves into the aesthetics of horror, and horror media. The paradox is described by psychologists as the enjoyment of unpleasant emotions caused by horror fiction, such as fear, anxiety or disgust, that would normally be avoided. Berys Gaut, in his article “The Paradox of Horror” tells how it is closely related to the paradox of tragedy by Aristotle and discusses why do humans enjoy fictions and contents that produce, generally, unpleasant or uncomfortable emotions in those who consume them. As stated by Katerina Bantinaki in her article “The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion”, this pleasure is similarly experienced by children; that is why there is a relation between children’s fairytales (and the witch) and this phenomenon. She says that the appeal for children is that they experience a feeling of risk, intensified emotions that turn into satisfaction once they have conquered that fear that initially got to them. She states that “Mastering their feelings of fear and confronting a task they did not think they would dare to do creates a feeling of strong exhilaration that children sometimes seek repetitively” (Bantinaki 389). Then, something similar happens to adults when consuming horror media. According to Bantinaki, there is no apparent risk to watching a horror film, but there is still an anxiety-inducing situation that the adult ultimately benefits from. She details that “[...] the subject is voluntarily exposed to a stressful situation that elicits fear and anxiety for no practical end (so the element of play inheres here as well). And there are, to a certain extent, parallel benefits” (Bantinaki 390).

Arguably, the most famous witches in children’s literature reside in the Grimm brothers’ stories. “Hansel and Gretel” was published in 1812; and its witch is what is known as the crone. This witch is characterized for having a very particular look. She is an older woman, usually with white hair and a wrinkly face, similar to the depiction of la Celestina mentioned above. This crone lives in the forest and, in the case of Hansel and Gretel, tries to lure children in to eat them. This depiction resembles greatly the image of Baba Yaga, an iconic figure of Slavic

folklore. David Barnett, in his article "Baba Yaga: The Greatest 'Wicked Witch' of All?" (2022), details her history and how she influenced other crones in popular culture.

Another very notable witch would be the Evil Queen from "Snow White"; book published in 1812 as well as "Hansel and Gretel". Contrary to the crone, the depiction of this witch is far from a wrinkly old lady, she is an attractive but very vain queen. This witch is characterized by occupying a motherly role but not fulfilling it, thus, neglecting her children, and that is the origin of her wickedness. Kerry Baker delves in her thesis *Representations of Witches and Witchcraft in Children's Literature* in how the Evil Queen uses emotional manipulation to achieve her purpose, in this case, murdering Snow White. She also compares her to Jadis, since both their purpose and their tactics are quite similar (Baker 34).

These are just three instances among many of evil witches present in children's literature; however, while there are multiple depictions of evil women, —such as Cinderella's stepmother— they lack a supernatural factor and are not considered witches.

That said, the witch does not always imply an evil old or vain woman; for instance, Hermione Granger, from the saga *Harry Potter*, with the first book published in 1997 by J.K Rowling. Hermione saves, on many occasions, the lives of her male counterparts, Harry and Ron, by displaying her vast knowledge of sorcery and spells. She is not solely a witch; it is just a quirk that she happens to have, added to other many qualities she presents throughout the movies.

So, this literary archetype has suffered an incredible evolution from those first women who were involved in spiritual practices, to characters with defined attributes, who are not reduced just to magical powers.

1.4. Depictions of witches in film media

1.4.1. Types of Witches on Film

As Heather Greene details in *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft* (2021), the first depiction of a witch in film media came in 1898, just three years after the invention of cinema, with the movie *The Cavalier's Dream*, by Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton. It is a terror silent film that depicts how a witch —represented as a crone— disappears and then is capable of shapeshifting into a young, beautiful girl.

According to Rebeca López Villar in her book *¿Quién no es Bruja?* written in 2022, the importance of the figure of the witch in recent film media is undeniable, since the number of movies released that feature witches have been such that it has created its own genre. Nonetheless, this may not always be favorable for women, as filmmakers and directors do not,

generally, use the witch as a feminist symbol but to perpetuate stereotypes that have persisted in society for some time due to economic reasons (López Villar 118).

This section aims to explore the most historically significant witch archetypes, with a primary focus on Greene's classification. In another one of her books, called *Bell, Book and Camera* (2018), Greene establishes three main categories for the classification of the character of the witch, denominated as the accused woman, the wild woman, and the fantasy witch. Greene details that,

For example, in the historical drama, she is a young, accused woman. In the western adventure, she is an elderly wild woman. In the fantasy genre, the witch takes her most iconic role as the magical fantasy crone with a broomstick and bubbling cauldron (Greene 36).

Furthermore, these categories have subcategories that aim to represent all the diverse portrayals of the character. The most prominent and well-known subtypes reside within the category of the fantasy witch. She encompasses the Halloween witch, the vamp, or the good fairy, among several others, but perhaps these represent the more iconic and common portrayals of the witch in film media.

As stated by Greene in *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft* the representation of the first type, the accused woman, takes place between 1896 to 1912. She does not have any powers per se, nor is she seen performing any kind of magical practice, however, Greene explains that this type of witch is present in films that take place during witchcraft trials, usually set in New England—most likely, Salem. In these silent films, the witch is usually accused by someone who wants revenge against her due to “social disobedience”. Depending on the film, the accused witch may be already an outcast in society or may not significantly deviate from the canon. Nevertheless, she always does something—usually rejecting a man's sexual advances—that leads to her accusation and trial for witchcraft. So, her rejection comes after she is accused by someone who wants revenge due to “social disobedience” (39-40). This rejection could be reminiscent of Lilith, mentioned above. Brian Joseph Hadsell connects in his thesis *Men, Women and Witchcraft*, the image of the witch of the American colonies to Lilith, who refused to bed Adam and was punished for it, according to Jewish mythology (Hadsell 11). In *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft*, Greene exemplifies this category of the witch with movies such as *In the Days of Witchcraft* (1909) or *The Trials of Faith* (1912) (37), but also with modern ones, like *The Crucible* (1996) by Arthur Miller (25).

However, the predominance of one type does not exclude the simultaneous existence of the others as each of the three categories she establishes are represented by at least one film during

the same period. Greene adds how the witch also appears in other genres, not just in historical dramas, and in genres such as in westerns, in which the type of witch that appears is the wild woman (44-45). In *Bell, Book, and Camera*, Greene defines the wild woman as “a woman on edge” (Greene 7), and she possess either power, knowledge or skills that positions her outside of what is acceptable. She notes that, during this era, the representation of this archetype is narrower. She argues that “although in future decades there are a variety of wild woman constructions, in this era there are only two: the young wild mother and the old woman in the woods. It is the latter that dominates” (45). This elderly woman, Greene asserts, develops from characters like the three witches from *Macbeth*, or Baba Yaga, all mentioned above. Living in the woods, this type resembles the fantasy crone, with the difference that this witch is portrayed within a realist setting, which implies the absence of the fantastic elements normally associated with the crone (46-47). The other sub-genre of the wild woman is the young wild mother, who while bearing some similarities with the accused woman, is not rejected for deviating from the canon. Instead, the young wild mother is already external to society —often situated in a literal, physical space apart from society. And, Greene adds that, unlike the old woman, she cannot stay in the margins, she has to be reincorporated into the canon to keep being of value to society (50).

The fantasy witch is also born in this period. With early adaptations like *The Wizard of Oz* (1910), the magic of this witch is unexplained, aligning her closer to the traditional characters of fairy tales than to a woman who is excluded in society, such as the previous examples (52-53). Greene notes that this type does not bring horror into the film, but she is never good either. She is the final challenge of the protagonist to fulfill the happy ending (59).

The author concludes the study of this particular window of time by observing that the depiction of the character is only a natural evolution from literary archetypes that already existed, Hollywood merely portrayed in film a character long present in books (64).

Examining the years from 1913 to 1920, Greene introduces the Mystical Adolescence and the Wild Girl. The focus of the narratives changes and is now centered in a younger witch but, nevertheless, the film genres remain the same as in the previous period (82). In the case of this young witch, themes like gender, age, witchcraft and marriage are in the focal point of her narrative, for as marriage is placed as the contrary of her agency. The movies produced in this period usually end with the witch accepting marriage, and therefore, being accepted again in society, as she has conformed. Another important factor, which earns her the label of “wild” is the traditional association of rationality with men while women are viewed through the lens of

witchcraft and untamed nature. This irrationality is also associated with adolescence, since the teenager has an awakening —both sexual and of powers— from which she needs saving (78). Nevertheless, during this period, fantasy was still the main genre in which the character was represented. The fantasy crone appeared in movies such as *Snow White* (1916), *Cinderella* (1914), or *Feathertop* (1913), and in primarily adaptations of fairy tales. This fantasy crone embodies the look of the prototypical witch, with dark clothing and magical elements usually associated with her, such as a cauldron or a broom (87).

One important factor that has greatly influenced the film industry during this period was the advancement of technology, which allowed filmmakers to make longer films. Greene considers that is in this era that the figure of the witch starts dividing into being a figure of oppression as well as a figure of empowerment (101-102).

In the years between 1921 to 1933 the figure of the witch saw a notable decline in cinematic representation. Apart from some portrayals— of the same types as seen above— that took place in the earlier years of the period, the witch largely disappeared from the screens. Greene attributes this shift to changing moral and cultural values; the Roaring Twenties led to a rise of the portrayal of the so called “independent woman”, so the witch, who was almost exclusively built on gender roles and stereotypes, disappeared (107).

It was not until between 1934 and 1940 that the witch reappeared in film and media. Creed explains that the liberal mindset of the previous period shifted, prompted by a series of circumstances— such as declining movie ticket sales— allowing the resurgence of the strict moral code that harbors the perfect conditions for the appearance of the witch (131). Although the types of witches remained the same as in previous decades, the witch now had more agency, something new from the silent historical dramas or the westerns. The fantasy witch was the most relevant during this period, since the movies released embodied witches such as the Halloween witch, the fantasy crone, and the good fairy (136). Furthermore, there is a new construction, the vamp, Greene defines this type as

Derived from the word vampire, “vamp” was a term coined in the silent era for female characters who were shockingly beautiful temptresses. [...] Disney’s Wicked Queen fits the description. She is an incarnation of the middle-aged fantasy witch, who is often associated with an obsessive desire to maintain youth and beauty (Greene 136).

The vamp is an archetype rooted in the image of the femme fatale, which Greene notes, is shaped by iconic actresses of the 1930s, such as Greta Garbo (152). Based on this foundation, the archetype also appears in modern movies, embodying similar traits. López Villar details in her book how Elaine Parks, from *The Love Witch* (2016), by Anna Biller, uses her femininity

and her looks to bewitch men, leaving them in a depressive state that usually leads to suicide (López Villar 146).

As Greene mentions, the Evil Queen, originally featured in the Grimm Brothers' tales mentioned above, is now reimagined in Disney's animated adaptation. She epitomizes this archetype, spending most of the film as a beautiful young queen, yet later transforming into the fantasy crone, along with the visual markers that reinforce the stereotype (wrinkles, the dark cloak, etc.) (150-151).

Other important appearances are the Halloween witch and the Good Fairy. The most notorious example of these witches appears in 1939, when *The Wizard of Oz* is released (157). The Wicked Witch of the West changes some of the elements that were deemed traditional in the depiction of the fantasy witch, for example, her place of residence. Greene explains that rather than dwelling in the woods she lives in a castle, setting reminiscent of the classic horror icons of the time such as Dracula or Frankenstein (161). However, Glinda serves as her counterpart, and Greene notes that,

[...] Glinda is visually constructed as an angel, a fairy, or something of heaven. She wears pink and white and lightly glitters. Her hair falls down around her shoulders in golden waves and her face is always framed in soft focus. [...], the good witch descends from the heavens to help and, when done, ascends back into the clouds (Greene 163).

Glinda's power does not reside within her, but comes from her wand, suggesting that she does not truly own her power, contrary to the Wicked Witch, who has a greater sense of agency. An important element is the film's suggestion that goodness is tied to physical beauty, for only bad witches are ugly, re-enforcing the idea that self-empowered witches are marked as undesirable (164-165).

Arguably, this period in film saw the emergence of some of the most iconic and enduring representations of witches, reshaping how filmmakers approached and built her image.

All these changes in the representation of the character depend on multiple sociocultural factors throughout history, Greene states that "the beginning and ending markers are informed either by trends in production, industry-based changes, or larger, socially relevant events" (18). Nonetheless, the witch has established herself as a lasting icon in cinematic history, regardless on the genre in which she is portrayed. Her transformation— from the early accused woman to the fantasy witch— serve as a cultural marker of both the historical oppression and the emerging empowerment she represents.

1.4.2. Abjection and othering

The character of the witch, after all the evolution she has suffered, embodies both oppression and empowerment. Nevertheless, two concepts remain consistently associated with her, regardless of the intent behind her portrayal. These two concepts are abjection and othering. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term “abjection” as “the state of being extremely unhappy, poor, unsuccessful, etc.” (“*Abjection*”). In 1980, Julia Kristeva published a book called *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in which she reformulates the meaning of the term. She defines something abject as a rejected object, something vanished but still present, it resides in an uncanny place. Kristeva asserts that the abject is not only something physically disgusting, but something that causes discomfort, that “[...] disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (2-4). This notion is aligned with the concept of “othering”, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “the act of treating someone as though they are not part of a group and are different in some way” (“*Othering*”). Furthermore, Barbara Creed adds in her book, *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), that “although the subject must exclude the abject, the abject must, nevertheless, be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life” (Creed 9).

Both abjection and othering are phenomena that are constantly applied to the character of the witch, since she embodies both perfectly. Ann McKenzie Roge applies them in her thesis *Revolting Bodies. Abjection and the Monstrous Feminine in The Witch* to the film *The Witch* (2015), by Robert Eggers. She states that, when Thomasin has lost all her family and has embraced the devil, she “[...] has undoubtedly been transformed—from child to woman, from the symbolic into the abject [...]” (Roge 38).

Another example would be Melissandre, from *Game of Thrones*, as Adri Maryke van Heerden-Smit details in her dissertation *The Monstrous Feminine and the Abject in HBO's Game of Thrones*. She expresses that “just like the witch, [...], the abject looms ominously, representing an ‘invisible’, yet perceived threat, which terrifies not only because it approaches from the outside, but also because its vestiges dwell uncannily within” (van Heerden-Smit 77).

So, abjection is something that seems to be very present in horror movies and in the depiction of certain monsters, such as the witch. Creed states that “the horror film would appear to be, in at least three ways, an illustration of the work of abjection [...]” (Creed 10).

1.4.3. The Monstrous Feminine

The monstrous feminine is a theoretical framework that Barbara Creed developed in the homonymous book, published in 1993. This concept is closely connected to the concept of abjection, since Creed bases much of her analysis on Kristeva's work. The monstrous feminine delves into how the grotesque of female monsters is usually rooted in their gender, body, or sexuality, as Faye D. Effard details in her article "The Monstrous-Feminine on Screen: The Changing Face of Cinema's Female Monsters".

Barbara Creed points out the many ways in which monstrous women are portrayed in film, and how her construction is never explored in depth (1). The masculine monster differs greatly from the feminine monster, and it is important to note that feminine monsters are often constructed through a lens that emphasizes sexuality, which influences and limits their representation. Then, Creed criticizes how the treatment of the woman in the horror genre has always revolved around the male figure, stating that the female monster is just a non-male rather than a female, with no female monsters comparable to the iconic male monsters (3).

Creed, in examining Kristeva's work, points out that the horror genre revolves constantly around abjection, focusing on the limits between the rational and the irrational, for example with movies such as *Carrie*, and *The Omen*. It also dwells in the boundaries between the monster and the human, seen in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, between those who conform gender roles and those who do not, like *Psycho*, and between an anomalous and a normal sexual desire, as in *The Hunger* (11).

In the chapter Creed dedicates to the witch, she points out how "one of the first films to present a terrifying picture of the witch was a children's film, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)", but her portrayal does not directly imply a horrifying representation (Creed 73). There were movies that contained this character that did not include horror elements, but humorous, or documentary ones. However, after 1939, the witch as a horror protagonist became more habitual, but her depiction was still somewhat shallow, still more focused on a male counterpart. Nowadays, however, the witch is portrayed with more agency, seen in movies like *Inferno*, *Carrie* or *Suspiria* (73).

The witch, according to the author, is feared because she entails a danger to the structure of the community, she has powers that cannot be controlled by the (patriarchal) system and that is deemed threatening, and she is rejected (76). She states that the witch is

An abject figure in that she is represented within patriarchal discourses as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order. She is thought to be dangerous and wily, capable of drawing

on her evil powers to wreak destruction on the community. The witch sets out to unsettle boundaries between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary. Her evil powers are seen as part of her 'feminine' nature; she is closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature (Creed 76).

Witchcraft is also intertwined with the concept of the monstrous feminine in Luca Guadagnino's 2018 remake of the movie *Suspiria*. This connection is explored by Lindsay Macumber in her article "Radically Feminist or Monstrously Feminine?: Witches and Goddesses in Guadagnino's *Suspiria* (2018)", who states that "*Suspiria* [...] represents women's bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood itself, as monstrous and abject" (Macumber 7). This female monstrosity also resides in the film's dream sequences, depicted through rapid photograms that evoke bodily abjection (involving blood, organs, or orgasming women) (9).

Arguably, the witch is one of the most representative figures of concepts such as the monstrous feminine, as she is feared and rejected, but also serves as a figure of empowerment. She is the point of convergence of anxieties about female power and sexuality, and the monstrous feminine is an ideal analytic point to see how this translates in film.

2. IS THE WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST TRULY WICKED?

2.1. 1939—The Wizard of Oz

In 1939, Victor Fleming directed the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, produced under Metro Goldwyn-Mayer. It was based on the book by L. Frank Baum, written in 1900, which was called *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Heather Greene mentions in *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft* that Hollywood did not create the image of the witch entirely, as the witch had already a number of set characteristics that made her recognizable—as seen in the previous section—depicted in literature, art, history, and more. Nonetheless, the image of the witch has always been subjected to the society in which it was produced, as different political and sociological periods in the history of the U.S led to different approaches and perspectives on the character (16-17, 19-20). The 1930s is an especially relevant period for cinema, as seen in the previous section. Changes in the mindset of the era prompted the reappearance of the witch, that lost popularity during the years in which women were conceived as independent—that is, the 1920s—, (Greene 131-132). As previously discussed, there were various movies featuring witches, however the most important two were *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by Disney, and *The Wizard of Oz*, by Victor Fleming, which introduced The Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda.

This representation of the Wicked Witch of the West is particularly significant, since, as Greene points out, she is portrayed in a completely different way as before, and Margaret Hamilton's character became the prototype of a fantasy witch, whose characteristics have been discussed already (157-158).

The author goes on detailing the character in depth, from her clothing, the modest black dress and cape paired with a pointy black hat, to her cauldron and broomstick, and her facial features such as her pointy nose and chin. All these elements are intentional, but perhaps the most important, Greene comments, and something completely new that was not in the previous versions of the story, is her green skin, which is something that came completely out of a technical issue with the lighting, and it changed the course of Halloween witches forever (Greene 159-160). As for the election of green in particular, Greene says

[...] it could be speculated that the color is commonly associated with monsters, greed, and the sick. On the body, green symbolically exists in the realm of the unnatural, the inhuman, or the abject. [...] Therefore, the use of green skin could have been a visual cue aligning the Wicked Witch with the horrific (Greene 160).

In contrast with the Evil Queen from *Snow White*, the Wicked Witch of the West does not seek beauty, but power. Greene indicates that her sole purpose is to recover her sister's shoes in

order to gain more power; therefore, she only exists to instill fear in both the characters and the audience (Greene 161).

2.2. Wicked

Due to the lack of background information on the Wicked Witch, Gregory Maguire wrote *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995), providing a story that explains how Elphaba Thropp—now named for the first time—came to be the figure that is portrayed in the original film. *Wicked* has as its original source the 1900 novel by Frank L. Baum, however, it is a new and different work. As a rewriting of Elphaba's origin story, Maguire's narration traces Elphaba's life from her birth to university, illustrating how the mistreatment she suffers— from society, and mostly from her own father— along with the Wizard's manipulation, shapes the monster she was always assumed to be.

Maguire's book became a musical in 2004, and it premiered on Broadway, where it continues to be performed to this day. According to Broadway Inbound, *Wicked* is among the longest-running musicals in Broadway history ("The World of Wicked"). Nearly two decades after its debut, it gained enough traction to begin the production of a film adaptation around 2021, directed by Jon M. Chu and released in 2024.

However, both the musical and its film adaptation differ substantially from the original source material, having been adapted for a more family-friendly audience. As the aim of this dissertation centers around the analysis of the construction of the figure of the witch through the character of Elphaba, the primary source for the analysis will be the film adaptation which delves much more into Elphaba herself.

All her life, Elphaba has experienced things that almost foreshadows her transformation as the Wicked Witch. For example, the rejection she endured by her father, who not only ostracized her for her skin color, but also because she is the product of her mother's extramarital affair with the Wizard who, conveniently, gave her a green elixir. Nonetheless, the film begins truly explaining Elphaba's backstory when she enters university. Here, she demonstrates a surge of uncontrolled power, disrupting everything in the courtyard after becoming angry at someone for mishandling Nessarose. This incident draws the attention of Madame Morrible, who decides to mentor Elphaba in controlling her powers. She also meets Glinda who, portrayed as the quintessential popular blonde girl, serves as a foil to Elphaba's reserved and timid nature. Gradually, Elphaba begins to slowly transform into a proper witch, marked by visual clues and an increased control of her powers, at their peak in stressful moments for her. A crucial moment in the narrative is the Ozdust Ball, where Glinda invites Elphaba as a hoax, gifting her a pointy

hat, an item that will later become one of her most defining symbols. However, Glinda begins to feel remorse upon seeing that everyone is laughing at Elphaba, who appears especially vulnerable. Eventually, at the visit with the Wizard, Elphaba is manipulated into reading the Grimmerie, but she soon realizes that the Wizard is a fraud and that they are just using her because of her abilities, abilities he lacks. Following this revelation, Madame Morrible and the Wizard start a propaganda campaign against Elphaba, branding her with derogatory labels, most notably, “wicked”. Reminiscent of the persecution and the witch hunts of the Early Modern Period in Europe, this moment marks the creation of the Wicked Witch of the West: a woman who refused to be manipulated into actions that went against her principles, and who chose to stand up for herself, even if it meant becoming “the Wicked Witch of the West”. At the height of her transformation, during “Defying Gravity”, Elphaba adopts a broomstick and a cape, completing the iconic image popularized by Hamilton in the MGM film, which completely reshaped the cinematic portrayal of the fantasy witch. Her transformation and that transgression of the patriarchal system, are connected to her condition as a witch and as “the Other”. So, her evolution is especially remarkable, as she goes from a naive girl that admires the Wizard, to a strong young woman who knows the value of her power and who does not yield to the Wizard’s manipulation. This is something that could remind of some of the witches already discussed in this dissertation, such as Lilith or Circe.

2.2.1. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

In both the original film of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and in *Wicked* (2024), there is a clear portrayal of a male-dominated country, bewitched by the Wizard, who they admire and follow blindly. This social context helps explain why, mostly in *Wicked*, the land of Oz does not question the Wizard’s judgement when Elphaba is portrayed as a “wicked witch”, for as their virtuous leader could not be mistaken.

In the original 1939 film, Dorothy manages to return home, not with the help of the Wizard, but through the ruby slippers, item that originally belonged to a witch. The man who was idolized from the beginning of the narrative, portrayed as the wisest man in the land, is revealed to be “a humbug” who has built a reputation solely on his oratory, not on any real magic. The only two characters to demonstrate magical powers are Glinda and the Wicked Witch. However, as discussed above, Glinda’s powers come from her wand, not from within herself, unlike the Wicked Witch, whose powers reside solely inside her.

This blind idealization is also present in *Wicked* (2024) and in similar fashion to the 1939 film, it is revealed that all the stories about him, and his powers, were mere inventions. He could not

read the Grimmerie—a magical book of spellings—but was in search of someone powerful, yet gullible enough to read it to fulfill his fascist plan for Oz. However, Elphaba confronts him and does not give in to his manipulation, posing a threat to his plan. This disruption—along with the fact that Elphaba possesses something he does not—would explain the deep hatred he harbors towards her in both *Wicked*, and in *The Wizard of Oz*, to the extent of manipulating Dorothy into killing her.

Ultimately, the revered figure of the Wizard is a product of propaganda crafted by a man cunning enough to deceive an entire nation, but that lacks any sort of real magical abilities. Believing that Elphaba would be susceptible to his lies, he is threatened when she is not, so he turns her into a public enemy, thereby revealing his true power—his influence. Elphaba is the ultimate counterpart of the Wizard, a man with great influence, but with no power, and she is (at least at the beginning of *Wicked*), a woman with tremendous power, but with no social acceptance whatsoever.

In both films, the construction of Elphaba is crucial to understand the character of the witch. Discussed in previous sections, the figure of the witch returned to film media due to the socio-political state of the U.S. in the 1930s, a rise in conservatism that prompted the appearance of one of the characters that better displays traditional gender roles (Greene 131-132). So, in the original *The Wizard of Oz* film, the Wicked Witch is—out of all the different typologies Greene details in her book—the epitome of the modern fantasy witch, most notably, of the Halloween witch. Margaret Hamilton wore prosthetics that altered her real face structure to further convey the idea that evil is related to ugliness, and together with the costume and the green skin, she became a statement of how Halloween witches should look like.

However, *Wicked*, abandons the sexist idea that goodness is only related to beauty, and instead, focuses more in Elphaba's construction and her monstrosity by means of other elements such as her green skin, or her power. While Hamilton's Wicked Witch posed an inconvenient to Dorothy's plan to use the ruby slippers, Elphaba poses a real dangerous threat to the established patriarchal power, and that is why she is made a public enemy to Oz (Creed, 76).

Ultimately, both Elphaba and Hamilton's Wicked Witch are characters shaped by an amalgamation of external influences. The societies in which they exist play a crucial role in the character—defining them as monstrous by means of abjection and othering.

2.2.2. Good Witches and Bad Witches

Heather Greene states in *Lights, Camera, Witchcraft* that the original book written by Frank L. Baum had two good witches and two bad ones. Apparently, MGM followed the original source

for the bad witches, having the Wicked Witch of the East—who dies within the first minutes of the movie—and the Wicked Witch of the West, now the main antagonist of the film. However, the identities of the good witches are changed: Glinda, originally the Good Witch of the South, is now the Good Witch of the North—or just Glinda the Good—, while the original Good Witch of the North, described as an old lady, is absent (164).

Greene also delves in the differences between the film's portrayal of the Good Witch and the Bad Witch. While the only difference that is stated directly in the film is that 'only bad witches are ugly' (*The Wizard of Oz*), there are numerous cues (mostly visual) that differentiate the two characters. While The Wicked Witch of the West is the perfect representation of the Halloween Witch, Glinda's depiction is that of the Good Fairy archetype.

As Greene observes, Glinda's characterization closely resembles that of a fairy godmother, as she is not initially identified as a witch (57). Their physical appearance—as previously discussed—remains the most obvious difference between both, however, another important cue is that they are constructed within the boundaries of Christian thought. Greene details that

Good witches are then identified by graceful movements, love of children, socially given power, a heaven-based Christian aesthetic, and ideal beauty. Evil witches are defined by ugliness, a disregard for dogs, a hell-based Christian aesthetic, Halloween iconography, and full self-empowerment (Greene 165).

Greene goes to compare Glinda's visuals to that of a fairy or celestial being—with her pink glittery dress and curly blonde hair, she arrives gracefully in a pink bubble descending from the sky, and after she helps, goes back the same way. In contrast, the Wicked Witch emerges from the ground and is surrounded by orange smoke, reminiscent of the Christian depiction of hell (163).

In *Wicked* (2024), although it is a modernized adaptation, this difference remains. Glinda is always seen wearing pink flowy fabrics, reminiscent of cotton candy along with her beautiful blonde hair, whereas Elphaba wears restricting Victorian shapes, with dark corsets and shoulder pads. She has her long black hair in braids, and she always wears shapes that are even similar to fungi, rather than the pretty frocks that Glinda is seen in. The casting of the actresses chosen to portray Glinda and Elphaba is not coincidental neither. Ariana Grande, who plays Glinda, is petite with a high-pitched voice, and exudes a bubbly personality, closer to the archetype of a Disney princess. In contrast, Cynthia Erivo, cast as Elphaba, has a stronger physical presence with a deeper vocal tone, and a more solemn presence, which reinforces their overall differences.

Both Elphaba and Glinda are constructed within a primary archetype of a witch; Elphaba the Halloween Witch, and Glinda the Good Fairy. However, while Elphaba —or rather The Wicked Witch of the West— embodies that primary type, her character cannot be defined by means of one single archetype. Throughout the film, she embodies multiple symbolic paradigms, for instance, she reflects the figure of the Wild Girl, a designation previously discussed, characterized by her association with an untamed nature. To become the strong, powerful witch she is by the end of the film, Elphaba must undergo a coming-of-age process, marked by urges of magic that symbolically align with her upcoming adulthood. As the narrative unfolds, she will gradually be cast in the role of an accused woman —by Greene’s classification— receiving baseless accusations solely for resisting the manipulative authority of the Wizard and Madame Morrible. Circling back to her visual appearance, she will also progressively start to resemble the crone, as she adopts symbolic visual elements (the hat, the broomstick, and the cape) the more she embodies her multilayered identity as a witch. Ultimately, all these cues —whether narrative, or visual— were meticulously crafted to clearly differentiate the good witch from the bad witch, associating certain features, such as green skin and a pointy nose, with ugliness and evil, while other ones like a soft appearance and blonde hair are closer to goodness and kindness.

2.2.3. Monstrous birth

From the moment she is born, Elphaba is portrayed as distinctly monstrous. In the novel, she is described as an unsettling green creature with black hair, long sharp nails, and pointed teeth, a description that already positions her in an abject realm. Even in *Wicked*, where she appears merely as a green-skinned baby with black hair, her father’s response is one of immediate repulsion. Elphaba also perceives herself as an abject figure; she is deeply uncomfortable with her green skin and even wonders if the Wizard might “degreenify” her if she asks and “does good” (*Wicked*). She longs for social acceptance and, in her idealization of the Wizard, wants to meet him to attain a sense of belonging, portrayed in the song “The Wizard and I” (Schwartz).

Throughout the film, Elphaba is also repeatedly positioned in situations that align her with Kristeva’s concept of the abject. As a child, Elphaba is the subject of bullying by her peers, who mock her skin color through cruel rhymes; and her reserved demeanor further isolates her and adds to the marginalization. Another example is upon her arrival at university, where she is met with intrusive stares; she is instantly marked as an outsider, and she is compelled to justify her skin color. The only moments in which Elphaba is not in the margins of society

occur when Glinda embraces her as a friend, following the events of the Ozdust Ball. Elphaba becomes accepted by others; acceptance prompted only because Glinda, at the center of the social canon, endorses her, so they follow. Nonetheless, this acceptance proves brief.

The moment in which she is portrayed as peak monstrous occurs at the end. After she has defied the Wizard's authority, Madame Morrible broadcasts a public message across all of Oz, recasting Elphaba as a monster, a "wicked witch" (*Wicked*) that ought to be the nation's enemy. In doing so, Madam Morrible completes the fabrication of the monstrous identity imposed upon Elphaba, inciting national hysteria. Given Elphaba's social exclusion, people rapidly assume it to be true — as no one has ever truly known her— it is easy to believe. From this point onward, Elphaba find herself once again alone —her sister turns on her, Glinda stays with the Wizard, and Elphaba, now fully embracing her identity as a witch, evades capture and escapes the guards.

2.2.4. Abjection and Othering— Always an Outcast

As previously discussed, the figure of the witch is inherently abject. Since birth, Elphaba has displayed powers that pose a threat to the established order, and—combined with the nonconformist nature she has proven to have— she comes to embody both the abject and the monstrous feminine perfectly.

These characteristics are further intensified through the presence of characters like Glinda, who functions constantly as a foil to Elphaba. Glinda is everything Elphaba should be to fit in society yet, fundamentally, she is not, she is just "the Other". Beyond the obvious visual cues previously presented, their characterizations are constructed in direct juxtaposition. At the beginning, Glinda hates Elphaba, but part of this animosity is rooted in pure envy. Elphaba represents all that Glinda wants to be by means of magic and in relation to Madame Morrible, whom she admires profoundly. In a similar fashion, Glinda represents the social acceptance that Elphaba longs for, at least in the beginning of the story. Their personalities are also pure contradiction; Glinda is concerned with boys and shallow matters, while Elphaba is focused on her studies and with deeper issues, for example the increasing discrimination of Animals in Oz. Is not only until they start being friends that they help each other with these desires— Glinda is accepted in Madame Morrible's seminary, and Elphaba stops being a social outcast. However, by the end of the narrative, they are more divergent than ever. Elphaba rejects the Wizard's fascist plan for Oz, whereas Glinda is more submissive, and with a conciliatory approach, begs Elphaba to apologize and make amends with him.

Nevertheless, Glinda is not the only character that functions as a foil to Elphaba; she must stand in contrast to the rest of the characters, for she is essentially an abject figure, as Creed declares that “ [...] the subject must exclude the abject, the abject must, nevertheless, be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life” (9).

Nessarose also poses a figure of contrast for Elphaba, especially in relation to their father. Following Elphaba's birth and the loss of his wife, her father directs his attention towards Nessa, emotionally neglecting Elphaba. This disregard is exemplified in Elphaba's enrollment at university, forced by her father only to care for Nessa, despite what her own desires might be. Nessarose persistently implores Elphaba to blend in, for if Elphaba does not attract attention, neither will she. However, this is deemed rather impossible, since Elphaba needs to be present in order to be excluded.

It is not until the end that Elphaba fully embraces her abjection and comes to terms with her powers. In doing so, she stops perceiving herself as an outcast and no longer seeks public validation. She becomes an empowered figure in her own right.

2.2.5. Empowerment

As explored through this dissertation, the figure of the witch has undergone quite an evolution across history, shifting from a symbol of oppression to one associated with empowerment, and Elphaba has experienced this evolution through the film as well. Elphaba transforms from a naive young woman who internalized her peers' bullying, even viewing herself as a monster, into a powerful witch who asserts her agency and refuses to submit to the oppression of others. However, this empowerment does not stem from cruelty or aggression, Elphaba is not shown doing anything bad at any point of the film. Rather, it comes from her recognition of the full extent of her abilities and her newfound sense of self-worth. During “Defying Gravity”, arguably the song in which this evolution is better showcased, Elphaba sings “I’m through with playing by the rules of someone else’s game” (Schwartz), demonstrating that, now that she has finally accepted herself, she won’t yield under the Wizard’s —or anyone for that matter— manipulation.

Elphaba's acceptance that she may lose loved ones (her sister and her father mainly) in the process of self-discovery and empowerment further distances her from Glinda, who decides to remain at the center of society out of fear of rejection. For Elphaba, marginalization is a familiar feeling as she has been cast aside her entire life. However, she now decides to reclaim it and seek strength, rather than detriment.

In conclusion, Elphaba embodies all the defining elements traditionally associated with the figure of the witch, from her physical appearance to her experience of abjection and othering, to ultimately, her evolution from a position of oppression to one of empowerment. This evolution in her self-perception aligns perfectly with the trajectory the figure of the witch has undergone across history, making Elphaba the paradigmatic example of the modern fantasy witch.

CONCLUSION

Building upon previous scholarly works which have the figure of the witch as the center, this study provides interdisciplinary insight into her representation across history, literature, and film. From classical texts to children's literature, and across film genres such as historical drama, westerns and horror, the witch remains an influential presence, worthy of critical and nuanced analysis.

By focusing on *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Wicked* (2024), this research seeks to identify and analyze the important elements that have contributed to the transformation of one of the most prolific figures in fiction, the modern fantasy witch. The analysis presented in this dissertation has demonstrated that Elphaba emerges as both a product of a transgression against an oppressive patriarchal order and as a figure marked as monstrous from birth. Positioned within the liminal space of the abject, her identity is always defined by a deviation from a normative structure in which, ultimately, she refuses to inhabit. However, she does not remain a passive symbol of marginalization; instead, she chooses to turn it around and reclaim her abjection, transforming it into a powerful source of agency. This act of empowerment further alienates her from the canonical system and intensifies the Wizard's hatred, who has already vilified and turned her into a public enemy. While Elphaba is constructed through many of the traditional tropes associated with the witch, she refuses being confined by them, for as her power renders so much more than such simplistic categories.

Ultimately, Elphaba's evolution —both as a witch, and as a woman— bears significant parallels with the historical development of the witch, and the overall sociocultural position of the woman. Examining both trajectories is crucial, since it underscores the importance of recognizing how this archetype can be reappropriated for empowering purposes, rather than used only for derogatory or pejorative representations. Elphaba as a character is not only one archetype of witch, but a synthesis of various, as she is a round character that develops throughout the movie, a sort of bildungsroman that is important to analyze.

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