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The Wizard of Oz and Wicked: A Feminist Critique

The Wizard of Oz is a movie that was released in 1939, a time when the United States was still recovering from the Great Depression, and so spirits were low for a lot of people throughout the country. Movie is about Dorothy, who is sick of her life in Kansas and wants to leave. She is fed up with not being understood or listened to by her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, as well as the three farmers that work there too. After her house flies away in a tornado, she embarks on a journey where she meets Scarecrow, Tin-Man and Lion as they help her get back home while she is being tracked down by the Wicked Witch of the West who needs her sisters ruby slippers that were given to Dorothy by Glinda, the Good Witch of the North. On the other hand, we have the movie Wicked. This movie was released in 2024, however, the Broadway musical play was first performed in 2003. The movie is split into two parts and the second part is still in the works, however, Wicked gives us the backstory of Glinda and Elphaba, the two witches from The Wizard of Oz. For this method of analysis, I chose to use the feminist criticism. According to "Rhetoric in Popular Culture" by Barry Brummett, he describes feminist criticism as "a wide-ranging group of approaches in rhetorical criticism. All feminist critical thinking begins from the assumption that there is gender inequality between men and women,

particularly in today's industrialized economies, and thus power differentials. Feminism tries to explain how such inequality is created and perpetuated through popular texts" (Brummett, 177).

In my analysis, I decided that I would choose my own examples of feminism in both *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wicked* as well as giving some examples of some anti-feminism I noticed in both movies as well.

First, I will start off with some examples I noticed of feminism in *The Wizard of Oz*. First off, Dorothy, a woman, is the main protagonist of the movie. Glinda, the good witch, as a powerful figure who helps Dorothy move forward. Even the wicked witch is a main antagonist female character. Dorothy is the one who helps her three male friends get to the Wizard and she even has full control in her decisions to go see the Wizard. This shows that *The Wizard of Oz* is pushing back on the idea that she needs a man to help her, although the men do help her out a little on the way. In comparison to *Wicked*, there are less ideas of feminism in this movie. There are two main female characters, Elphaba and Glinda and the Dean of Sorcery Studies, Madame Morrible who plays a huge role in the creation of Elphaba's "villain" arc. Since this movie is technically a musical, the songs in this movie play a huge part in moving the storyline along. The song "Popular" sung by Ariana Grande shows a sense of girlhood. In "The Wizard and I" sung by Cynthia Erivo and Michelle Yeoh, shows Madame Morrible encouraging Elphaba to put her powers to good use and "Defying Gravity" is another example of girlhood between Glinda and Elphaba, although some could argue that this is again Glinda betraying Elphaba once more for her own gain.

I will now move on to some ideas of anti-feminism I noticed in both movies, starting with *The Wizard of Oz*. Overall, The story encompasses a young girl who wants to break free from the life that is expected of her, but then ends up going back to it anyways and as well as that, the

Wicked Witch is an example of how society views powerful women. In *Wicked*, Glinda has a history of not exactly being very pro-women or what most girls today would consider to be a “girls-girl”. We get an example of this multiple times throughout the beginning of the film, but specifically I would like to mention the song “What Is This Feeling?” sung by Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo. Throughout the song we get lyrics like “Loathing. Unadulterated loathing. For your face, your voice, your clothing. Let's just say, I loathe it all. Every little trait, however small. Makes my very flesh begin to crawl.” However, it is important to note that Glinda and Elphaba are singing this to one another, but Glinda has a more back stabbing approach. There is also a scene where Glinda gives Elphaba a hat that she knows is ugly and tells her to wear it to the Ozdust Ball. Also, Madame Morrible throws Elphaba under the bus when she creates the idea that she is evil because her skin is green and turns everyone on Elphaba. And lastly, during the song “Defying Gravity” sung by Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande, we get lyrics sung by the army people that say ““Look at her! She’s wicked! Kill her!”. This shows that a woman’s life is not as important, particularly a powerful woman.

Overall I think something that Brummett does in his analysis is he uses a lot of examples that do not fit a very generalized idea of what most people would tend to consider when thinking of phallic symbols. Not only are some of the phallic symbols seeming to be a little bit of stretch, but the idea of the ruby slippers being red due to it symbolizing her period, however it has become known that the reason they are red was because in the book they are silver but they did not feel like it would have popped enough in the movie. Overall though I do think Brummett has an ability to think deeply about certain aspects of *The Wizard of Oz*.