

Exploring Hero, Trickster, and Shadow Archetypes in Winnie Holzman's Wicked

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Exploring Hero, Trickster, and Shadow Archetypes in Winnie Holzman's *Wicked*

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Abstract. This study explores Elphaba's character in Winnie Holzman's *Wicked* screenwriting by examining her archetypes and her narrative structure through the stages of the Hero's Journey and the archetypal roles of shadow and trickster in shaping her character development. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a data collection technique in the form of documentary study. The primary data source in this research is Winnie Holzman's *Wicked* screenwriting. The results of this research show that the 12 stages of the Hero's Journey formulated by Christopher Vogler as an adaptation of Joseph Campbell are thoroughly identified in the transformation of Elphaba, who is the main character. Other archetypes, such as shadow and trickster, contribute significantly to the conflicts that shape Elphaba's character development. This research provides evidence that myths and classical narrative structures of traditional stories and symbolic archetypes remain relevant for analyzing modern literary works, especially in revealing complex female characters. Through her conflict with the shadow and her interaction with the trickster, Elphaba develops from a recluse to a more confident, independent, courageous defender of justice, and accepting person.

Keywords: Archetype, Hero's Journey, Trickster, Shadow

INTRODUCTION

Archetypes are universal patterns, symbols, and concepts that reside in the unconscious mind. They reflect the collective unconscious through recurring and ancient motifs often appearing in dreams, fantasies, and myths (Feist & Feist, 2008). Archetypes are recurring character types or symbolic energies that appear universally in the dreams of individuals and the myths of diverse cultures (Vogler, 1992). Archetypes serve to advance the story and help identify the role of a character within it. The use of archetypes allows a story to connect with the audience on a deeper level, as they reflect universal human experiences. The presence of archetypes is also easily observable in everyday social interactions. They function as models or fundamental patterns of human personality and character.

Myths act as guides to what humans are capable of knowing and experiencing on a deeper spiritual level. Through myth, individuals can connect with universal truths and the energies that govern personal and cultural experiences (Campbell, 1988). Myth functions not only as a traditional story but also as a powerful literary tool in conveying

universal themes such as the search for identity, ¹³ the struggle between good and evil, and the dynamics of supernatural forces.

The Hero's Journey is a timeless narrative framework that outlines a hero's transformation all the way from a state of ordinary to extraordinary achievement, often through significant challenges. Heroes are often protagonists who embark on a journey of self-discovery, face great challenges and bring something valuable to their community (Campbell, 2004). Heroes symbolize the soul in transformation and represent the journey each individual takes through life. The stages of this progression the natural phases of growth and self-discovery form what is known as the Hero's Journey (Vogler, 1992).

The Shadow is the other side of the self. It consists of the parts of ourselves that we are unwilling to confront, often due to denial, fear, or societal condemnation (Freysson, 2020). The Shadow represents the energy of the dark side, the unexpressed, unrealized, or rejected aspects of the self. Often cast in the role of the villain or the clown, the Shadow symbolizes the confusion between illusion and reality, as well as the inevitable imperfections that arise from the unconscious realm (Campbell, 2004).

The Trickster is more than merely a deceptive character. Tricksters act as both destroyers and creators, heroes and villains, and are often portrayed with both masculine and feminine traits. They are figures composed of seemingly opposite characteristics. (Tikkanen, 2018). The archetype of the trickster embodies the existence of the unexpected as it appears in every human society, sometimes fully acknowledged, sometimes feared, and sometimes hidden (Oburumu, 2023).

This study aims to analyze the narrative structure of Winnie Holzman's *Wicked* by examining how the stages of the Hero's Journey, primarily based on Christopher Vogler's adaptation of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, shape Elphaba's character development and plot progression. The analysis focuses not only on the twelve stages of the Hero's Journey but also on the narrative functions of key character roles, such as the Trickster and the Shadow, as they contribute to the unfolding of the story. This study highlights Christopher Vogler's practical interpretation as the primary framework. Vogler's model not only outlines the stages of the journey but also emphasizes the significance of recurring character functions, such as the Trickster, who introduces uncertainty and change, and the Shadow, who embodies the antagonistic or darker aspects of the narrative. By applying this narrative structure approach, the research seeks to reveal how *Wicked* employs universal storytelling patterns and character function to explore themes of identity, morality, and power, engaging the audience through the Hero's Journey and the complex roles of its supporting characters.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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METHOD

This research employs a qualitative literary approach using Christopher Vogler's adaptation of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey framework to analyze character development and archetypal roles in Winnie Holzman's *Wicked* screenplay. The study focuses on how the Hero, Shadow, and Trickster archetypes influence Elphaba's transformation throughout the narrative. The primary data consists of selected scenes and dialogues from the 125-page screenwriting. The researcher serves as the primary

instrument in the study by performing close textual analysis and thematic mapping to trace key stages of the narrative and the functions of archetypes. The analysis explores how Elphaba's journey, from the ordinary world to the special world, is shaped by both internal and external conflicts, particularly through her encounters with the shadow and trickster figures. This method enables an in-depth interpretation of how these archetypes not only challenge the protagonist but also contribute to her growth, resistance, and eventual self-acceptance. Data collection involves identifying, classifying, and interpreting textual evidence that aligns with Vogler's twelve-stage structure, with particular attention to how each archetype contributes to the progression and complexity of the hero's journey.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Twelve Stages in Elphaba's Journey

Each journey stage reveals an essential phase in Elphaba's transformation as she deals with dilemmas, societal denial, and betrayals that force her to reassess her identity. Elphaba's nature is tested and reshaped, with each encounter bringing to light deeper layers of growth that both challenge those faiths and drive her towards a higher sense of personal freedom.

a. Ordinary World

Elphaba's Ordinary World is marked by rejection. Born with green skin due to her mother's affair, she is immediately disowned by her father "Take it away" (Holzman, 2024:7). This sets the tone for her strained family life and early social exclusion. Yet, constant bullying and her father's disapproval push her into defensiveness. At Shiz University, her appearance again draws ridicule. "You're... green," Galinda exclaims, to which Elphaba responds sarcastically (Holzman, 2024:14), reflecting years of prejudice. This hostile environment defines Elphaba's starting point, shaping the emotional conflict that propels her Hero's Journey.

b. Call to Adventure

Elphaba's Call to Adventure begins when Madame Morrible recognizes her magical talent. This stage presents a challenge or opportunity that pushes the hero out of the ordinary world. Morrible declares, "There is a defin-ish chance, if you work as you should, you'll be making good" (Holzman, 2024:25), presenting the opportunity Elphaba has dreamed of. This moment marks Elphaba's emotional commitment to her journey. She believes meeting the Wizard will bring acceptance, proving her worth and redefining her identity.

c. Refusal of the Call

Marked by fear and doubt. Though offered the chance to meet the Wizard, she says, "My father would never allow it" (Holzman, 2024:24), showing her emotional dependence. She also admits, "Something just comes over me... bad things happen" (Holzman, 2024:25), revealing her fear of her own powers. Elphaba sees her magic as dangerous rather than empowering, and this reluctance marks her struggle to leave behind the world that has rejected her.

d. Meeting the Mentor

The hero meets a figure who offers guidance. Elphaba's mentor is Doctor Dillamond, a talking Goat and the only Animal professor at Shiz University. Through their discussions, Elphaba learns about systemic discrimination against animals. Dillamond's statement "When people are hungry and angry, they begin to look for someone to blame" resonates with Elphaba (Holzman, 2024:38). Their bond awakens her moral

awareness and deepens her empathy, preparing her for the ideological battle she will soon face.

e. Crossing the First Threshold

Hero's decision to act despite the risks. Elphaba crosses the threshold when she overhears Doctor Dillamond and other Animals discussing the growing oppression in Oz. Disturbed by the injustices, she declares, "Someone's got to tell the Wizard" (Holzman, 2024:45), showing her commitment to uncover the truth. Though warned to stay silent, Elphaba chooses to step into a dangerous political reality. This moment signals her true departure from the familiar, as she begins to confront the forces behind the discrimination in Oz.

f. Tests, Allies, and Enemies

Elphaba's growth through challenges, new friendships, and confrontations with injustice. She forms an unlikely bond with Galinda, who jokingly says, "Elphie—now that we're friends, I've decided to make you my new project!" (Holzman, 2024:66), Elphaba's kindness transforms Galinda into a true ally. Elphaba faces her first moral test when Doctor Dillamond is dismissed: "Animals are no longer permitted to teach," he says (Holzman, 2024:72). Shocked, she protests, "Are we all just going to sit here in silence?!" exposing her refusal to be complicit. Her opposition deepens when Professor Nikidik unveils a lion cub cage, claiming, "He will likely never learn to speak." Elphaba angrily asks, "If it's so good, why is he trembling?" (Holzman, 2024:74). Assisted by Fiyero, who she once dismissed, Elphaba rescues the cub. This marks the solid formation of her key allies

g. Approach to the Inmost Cave

Elphaba enters this phase when she accepts the Wizard's invitation to the Emerald City. Although eager, she hesitates: "Prove myself how?! It's too soon, I'm not ready—" (Holzman, 2024:84), reflecting her fear of failure. Upon arrival, the Wizard greets her with theatrical grandeur: "I. AM. OZ! The Great and Terrible. Who are you and why do you seek me?" (Holzman, 2024:100). Elphaba responds with conviction: "My heart's desire is for you to help the Animals" (Holzman, 2024:104), affirming her selfless mission. Despite the Wizard's welcoming tone "Well, that's what I love best. Making people happy" the scene hints at deeper conflict ahead. Elphaba is now fully inside the "inmost cave," facing not just power, but the moral ambiguity it conceals.

h. The Ordeal

For Elphaba, the ordeal happens when she discovers that the Wizard and Madame Morrible are behind the oppression of Animals in Oz. Initially honored to be invited to the Emerald City, she is instead asked to cast spells from the *Grimmerie*, causing pain to a monkey, Chistery. When Elphaba realizes the truth "It's-- you. You're behind it all" (Holzman, 2024:110) This moment shatters Elphaba's ideals "You have no real power" (Holzman, 2024:111) She understands that the Wizard has no real power. This betrayal marks Elphaba's symbolic death; she rejects their control.

i. The Reward

Elphaba takes the *Grimmerie*, a powerful spellbook only true witches can read. This moment represents her Reward "She runs out with the *Grimmerie* in hand" (Holzman, 2024:112). The *Grimmerie* becomes Elphaba's symbol of power and resistance. By claiming it, she fully rejects the unfair leadership of Oz and steps into her own strength.

j. The Road Back

Elphaba escapes with *Grimmerie*, and Madame Morrible declares her a threat to Oz. Branded "Wicked Witch," Elphaba is pursued and misunderstood. She refuses to

surrender, saying, "It's the Wizard who should be afraid. Of me!" (Holzman, 2024:116). She urges Glinda to join her, but Glinda declines. As Elphaba dons the cloak, hat, and broom, she becomes the feared figure of legend. Her journey back is not a return to acceptance, but into isolation and resistance against the unfair in the land of Oz.

k. Resurrection

Elphaba leaps from the palace, symbolizing the death of her former self. As she falls, she hears the cruel voices of her past, her father, strangers, and society. In a vision, she sees her younger self and reaches out, only to find she's holding a broomstick. She rises, flying freely for the first time, shouting, "It's me!" (Holzman, 2024:120). This moment marks Elphaba's true resurrection, as she embraces her identity and leaves behind the need for external approval, choosing freedom and self-acceptance.

l. Return with the Elixir

Elphaba does not return to Oz as a celebrated hero, but instead leaves with a symbolic elixir, truth, freedom, and self-awareness. Though Glinda stays behind, Elphaba's journey continues. The elixir she brings back is not a physical treasure, but a deeper understanding of injustice and the courage to resist it. Elphaba's legacy is not conformity, but transformation choosing truth over acceptance, even at great personal cost.

2. The Ordinary World and Special World in *Wicked*

According to Christopher Vogler, the Hero's Journey is divided into three acts, Separation, Descent and Initiation, and Return, each consisting of twelve narrative stages. In *Wicked*, Elphaba's character arc closely follows this structure, charting her growth from a misunderstood outcast into a morally awakened and self-accepting hero.

a. Act I: Separation

Begins in the *Ordinary World* of Shiz University, where Elphaba is ostracized for her green skin and magical abilities. The *Call to Adventure* comes when Madame Morrible invites her to meet the Wizard, offering recognition and a purpose. Though tempted, Elphaba's *Refusal of the Call* reveals her inner insecurities and desire for her father's approval. *Meeting the Mentor* occurs through Doctor Dillamond, whose teachings awaken her awareness of injustice toward Animals and spark her inner transformation.

b. Act II: Descent and Initiation

Begins when Elphaba *Crosses the Threshold* by entering the Emerald City, leaving behind her old life. She then faces *Tests, Allies, and Enemies*, forming bonds with Glinda and Fiyero, and opposing figures like Morrible and the Wizard. *In the Approach to the Inmost Cave*, Elphaba uncovers the regime's corruption and must choose between complicity and resistance. During *The Ordeal*, she is betrayed and hunted, symbolically "dying" to her former self. Her *Reward* is self-knowledge and the strength to stand by her values.

c. Act III: Return

Begins with "*The Road Back*," where Elphaba becomes a feared figure, retreating from public life. In *The Resurrection*, she fully embraces her identity, no longer defined by others' perceptions. Finally, in *The Return with the Elixir*, Elphaba carries with her the wisdom, moral clarity, and courage to resist injustice, her true "elixir" even if it means living outside society.

3. Archetypes in *Wicked*

The Mentor archetype, traditionally characterized as a wise old man or woman, is first seemingly embodied by Madame Morrible, who initially encourages Elphaba to harness her powers and seek greatness by meeting the Wizard. The Threshold Guardian

archetype is represented by the institutions and individuals that stand between Elphaba and her goals. The Herald archetype, which signals the beginning of the adventure, appears when Madame Morrible tells Elphaba that she will contact the Wizard due to Elphaba's unique magical ability. The Shapeshifter archetype, often characterized by ambiguity and unpredictability, is notably portrayed by Glinda. The Shadow archetype which represents the dark forces that oppose the hero, both externally and internally is vividly embodied by several elements. The Ally archetype supports the Hero's journey. Glinda becomes a key emotional and strategic ally to Elphaba early on, while Fiery later joins her resistance, offering loyalty and support. The Trickster archetype introduces chaos and transformation. Glinda, through charm and manipulation, challenges Elphaba's beliefs. Madame Morrible and the Wizard also act as Tricksters, using deception to disrupt the status quo and drive key changes.

4. Shadow Archetypes in *Wicked*

In Winnie Holzman's *Wicked*, the Shadow archetype plays a crucial role in shaping the protagonist Elphaba's transformation throughout her Hero's Journey. According to Christopher Vogler's adaptation of the Hero's Journey, the Shadow represents both internal and external forces that challenge the hero by embodying fear, trauma, rejection, and repressed desires. Elphaba's internal Shadow emerges early in the story, rooted in her feelings of rejection due to her green skin and lack of parental affection. These experiences generate insecurity, self-doubt, and a persistent need for validation, which she initially masks with defensive humor.

As the narrative progresses, the internal Shadow manifests through her emotional reactions, particularly when she faces moral injustice. Her bond with Doctor Dillamond and reaction to his removal highlight how personal trauma parallels broader societal discrimination. Elphaba's journey reflects the dynamic interplay between her repressed emotions and her growing moral clarity. These tensions become critical turning points in key narrative stages, such as her hesitation to accept the Call to Adventure and her eventual defiance of the Wizard.

External Shadows take form in characters like Madame Morrible, the Wizard, and the society of Oz. Madame Morrible initially appears as a mentor but gradually reveals manipulative intentions. She exploits Elphaba's powers for personal and political gains, ultimately framing Elphaba as a public threat. The Wizard, once admired, becomes another figure of betrayal. He embodies the illusion of order, using scapegoating as a means of control. Society itself serves as a collective Shadow, quick to label Elphaba as "*Wicked*" simply because of her appearance and defiance.

External Shadows reinforce Elphaba's internal struggle, ultimately driving her to a climactic self-reckoning. In the Resurrection stage, as she confronts echoes of childhood trauma, she reaches symbolic rebirth. Accepting her inner child and her broomstick, a former sign of exclusion turned into a symbol of liberation, she fully integrates her Shadow. Her cry of "*It's me!*" marks a moment of radical self-acceptance.

Elphaba's Return with the Elixir is not marked by reintegration into society, but by the wisdom she gains from her journey. The courage to reject corrupt systems and the freedom to define her own truth. The Shadow, once a source of pain, becomes a catalyst for self-realization and moral empowerment. In *Wicked*, the Shadow archetype thus operates as both an obstacle and a transformative force, challenging the protagonist to embrace all aspects of herself in order to achieve true individuation and resistance against systemic injustice.

5. Trickster Archetypes in *Wicked*

The Trickster archetype plays a crucial role in Elphaba's transformation in *Wicked*. Defined by ambiguity and contradiction, the Trickster disrupts order while provoking growth. As Vogler (1992) and Campbell (2005), Tricksters challenge the hero through deception, irony, and unexpected support, serving as catalysts for change.

In the narrative, Madame Morrible manipulates Elphaba through praise and fake promises, only to exploit her powers. The Wizard pretends to be a benevolent leader while hiding his oppressive mission, shattering Elphaba's trust. Glinda, though more subtle, uses charm and social influence to confuse and challenge Elphaba emotionally. While not evil, her actions reflect the Trickster's dual nature and contribute to Elphaba's growth.

These characters do not oppose Elphaba directly, instead, they mislead, provoke, or indirectly support her transformation. Each serves as a narrative force that dismantles illusion, prompting Elphaba to choose her path. The Trickster, therefore, is not merely a disruptor but a key figure in shaping the hero's identity and independence.

6. The Interplay of Hero, Shadow, and Trickster in Elphaba's Transformation

Elphaba's journey in *Wicked* is not solely a tale of personal transformation but a complex narrative shaped by the dynamic interplay of three key Jungian archetypes: the Hero, the Shadow, and the Trickster. These archetypes do not function in isolation, instead, they intersect and interact, creating internal and external conflicts that ultimately shape Elphaba into a stronger, more self-aware, and independent character.

As the Hero, Elphaba undergoes the classic stages of the Hero's Journey as outlined by Joseph Campbell and adapted by Christopher Vogler. Her path from the Ordinary World to her Special World is marked by moral trials, rejection, and sacrifice. Despite being misunderstood and ultimately unaccepted by society, Elphaba's willingness to stand for justice and truth affirms her heroic identity. As Vogler notes, the Hero archetype involves sacrifice and the courage to protect what is right, even at great personal cost.

Elphaba's transformation would not occur without the presence of the Shadow. Her internal Shadow manifests as doubt, rejection, and a yearning for acceptance, while the external Shadow is embodied by Madame Morrible, the Wizard, and the oppressive Oz society. These forces compel Elphaba to confront hard truths, triggering the inner strength she needs to redefine herself. The Shadow, therefore, is both a source of pain and a catalyst for growth.

The Shadow, the Trickster archetype plays a critical role in destabilizing Elphaba's worldview. Characters such as Madame Morrible, the Wizard, and Glinda take on Trickster functions, deceiving, confusing, and manipulating Elphaba through charm, false promises, or irony. While Glinda's role is more nuanced and emotionally complex, Madame Morrible and the Wizard embody both Shadow and Trickster aspects, highlighting how a single character can fulfill multiple archetypal functions.

Through the combined influence of the Hero, Shadow, and Trickster, Elphaba's journey becomes not just a linear progression but a multidimensional process of identity formation. Her refusal to conform, her confrontation with darkness, both within and without and her navigation through betrayal and friendship all underscore how archetypal forces shape the journey of the hero.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing *Wicked* through the lens of the Hero's Journey combined with the archetypes of Shadow and Trickster, it becomes clear that personal transformation does not occur in isolation, but is shaped by internal and external conflicts. In *Wicked*, Elphaba's journey toward self-acceptance is not solely a hero quest; it is deeply influenced by forces that challenge her identity and choices.

The Shadow archetype appears both within Elphaba, through her feelings of self-doubt and alienation, and outside of her, through oppressive figures such as Madame Morrible, the Wizard, and Oz society. These forces constantly pressure her to conform, making resistance an act of self-definition. At the same time, the Trickster archetype complicates her path. Figures like Glinda, Madame Morrible, and the Wizard confuse Elphaba with charm, manipulation, or ironic support, demonstrating that transformation often arises from uncertainty and contradiction.

Wicked shows that a hero is not created solely by courage, but by enduring conflict and navigating the influence of others. Elphaba becomes a symbol of defiance not just through her actions, but through the internal and external tensions that shape her. Her journey highlights that identity is not fixed, but forged through struggle with shadow forces and unpredictable trickster archetypes that, together, compel the hero to rise.

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