Conjunction of the spheres

The struggle for hegemony in the English language online reception of Netflix adaption: The Witcher.

Sarah R. Kern

Department of Cultural studies

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Supervisor: Doron Galili

Abstract

This essay uses the concepts of convergence culture, transmedia and hegemony, to understand the struggles within the English language reception to Netflix Tv production "The Witcher." In order to help the reader, the essay presents the background to the larger Witcher franchise, as well as standard debates and issues within the fantasy genre, the role-playing-game genre and convergence culture.

Keywords: Production/reception; Hegemony; Discourse; Transmedia; Witcher; Fantasy, Polish Fantasy; Media literacy; Convergence culture; Fan-studies; Participation culture; Technical communication; Digital Role-Playing Games; Civic imagination; Netnography;

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1. Introduction

Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will[1][2]



The open university. (2014) *Professor Stuart Hall* [Photo] https://www.flickr.com/photos/the-open-university/15770937271 Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

This essay studies the English language, online reception of the Witcher franchise, specifically, the discourse around Netflix's adaption of the franchise[3] (focusing specifically on discourse that developed during the launch of season 3. Netflix has, however, created

[1] Below is a link to a snippet of an interview, and documentary, with Stuart Hall by Sut Jhally, then re-uploaded by an anonymous user. Margins, Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. Stuart Hall on Gramsci. https://youtu.be/0t-yrYtM6eY [Accessed 2023-08-03]

[2] For the transcript: Jhally, Sut. Stuart hall: the last interview. In Cultural Studies. (Vol 30, issue 2) 2016. Doi:10.1080/09502386.2015.1089918

3 The Witcher, Season 1-3 (Netflix 2019-2023) [Television program].

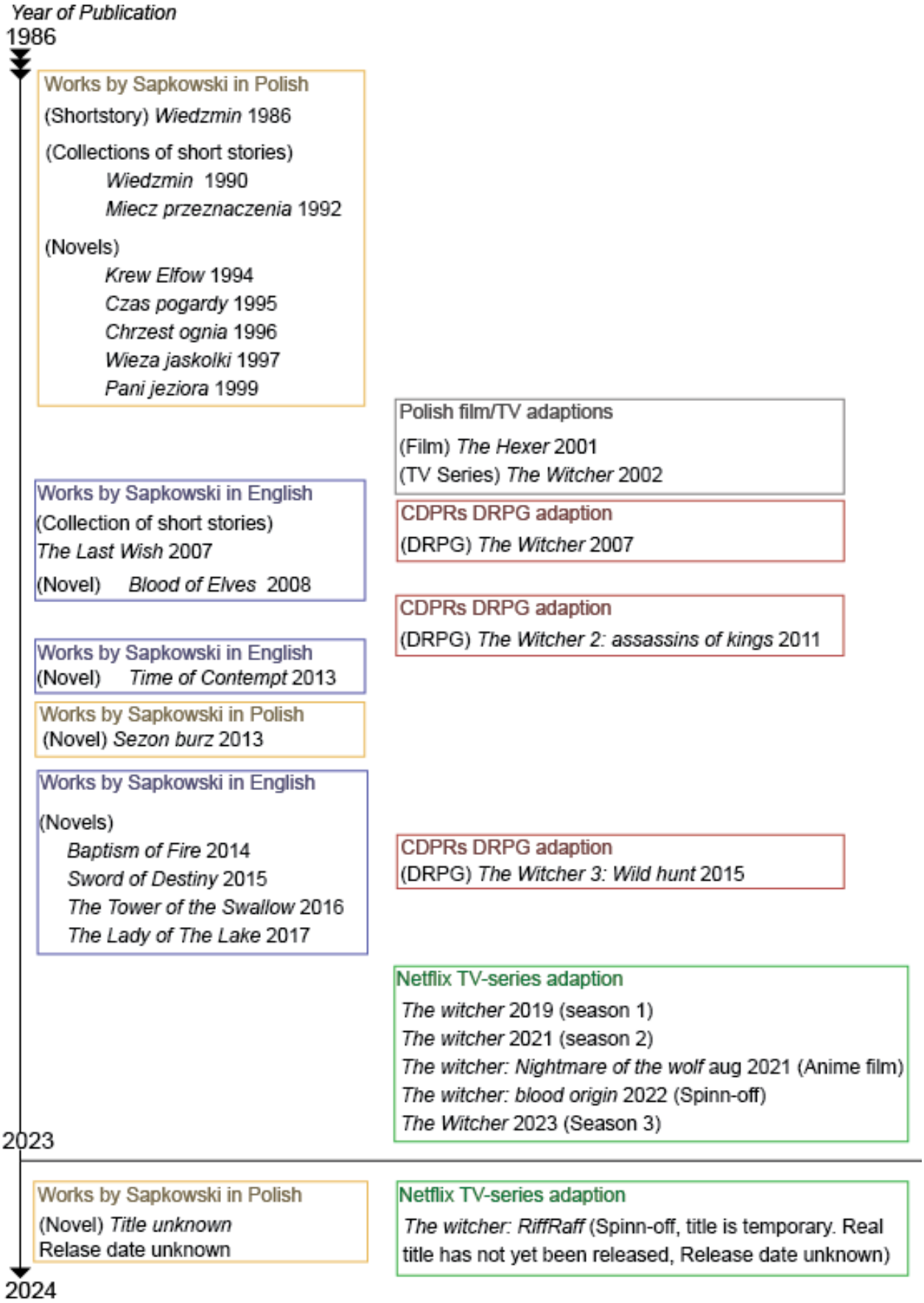
further spin-off tv-series[4] and one anime movie[5], with more spin off tv-series rumoured[6] to be released in the future.) These intertexts, paratexts and historical context influence the reception of The Witcher season 3, therefore the franchise's wider history and development will be described below.

This essay will focus on how reception within the Witcher fandom struggle with hegemony. Particularly "The tension between consent and resistance" [7] that exists within the theory described by Gramsci, especially, as that tension is expressed in a networked-, polarized-, and social world.[8] It will map out the most frequent issues that the fandom chose to discuss that relates to The Witcher and hegemony, and then analyse them using the concept of Hegemony, Transmedia, Convergence culture and Paratextuality.

An illustration of the franchise is included on the page after this introduction.

[4] The Witcher: Blood Origin, Season 1 (Netflix 2022) [Television program.]
[5] "The Witcher: Nightmare of the Wolf" (Netflix, 2021) [Anime Movie]
[6] Moore, Kasey. 'The Witcher' Rats / Riff Raff Netflix Spin-off: Everything we know so far, in *What's on Netflix* (2023) (accessed 2023-08-09) *https*://www.whats-on-netflix.com/news/the-witcher-spinoff-rats-riff-raff/
[7] Engstrom, Erika. Beliveau, Ralph. *Gramsci and Media Literacy, critically Thinking about TV and the Movies.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021. P.3
[8] Engstrom (2021) P.2f

1.1 ILLUSTRATION OF *THE WITCHER* FRANCHISE



1.2 A short history of the Case: The Witcher franchise, and its audience.

The Witcher is a fantasy novel series written by polish author Andrzej Sapkowski in the late 1980's until early 2010's. In Poland, Sapkowski remain very popular, but the English translation of his books are less known abroad.[9] Salkowski's Witcher franchise is, arguably, part of a subgenre of fantasy called grimdark,[10] which is geared toward adults. The first titles in the Witcher franchise are made up of legends and fairytales rewritten into a more realistic style, delivered in a collection of short-stories that grew into a series of six novels (out of which one is standalone) centred around the titular Witcher, Geralt of Rivia and/or Ciri of Cintra.

The Witcher is a monster hunting mutant, stoic and strong with physical, magical and mental prowess acquired through his mutant-transformation and vigorous training as a young orphan boy. Geralt does not age like a normal man, and neither does his love-interest, Yennefer of Vengerberg the Sorceress. Together they have an adoptive daughter, Princess Cirilla of Cintra. Ciri (her nickname) is a chosen one with magic, a prophesy, and a fate that keeps hunting her in the form of both monsters and men. She is the only one that can save the world.

The Witcher has been adapted into film in 2001, and into a TV series in 2002 – These were, for the time, expensive polish productions, but neither of them was successful, they are not particularly remembered today.[11]

Sapkowski met with the new polish game studio, CD PROJEKT RED (the studio will be referred to as CDPR going forward), who wanted to buy the rights to the Witcher franchise and adapt it into a digital role-playing game (that will be referred to as DRPG going forward).[12] Sapkowski declined a percentile of the profit, because he

[9] Reardon, Daniel C. Wright, David. *The Digital Role-Playing Game and Technical Communication: A History of Bethesda, BioWare, and CD PROJECT RED.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. P. 123

[10] Reardon (2021), P.296f. The authors give a definition of Grimdark as a subgenre that "subverts traditional fantasy tropes of good versus evil, the hero's monomyth, and presence of the metaphysical."

[11] Gawroński, Sławomir. Bajorek, Kinga. A Real Witcher – Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series? In the Circle of Multimedia Adaptations of a Fantasy Series of Novels 'The Witcher' by A. Sapkowski. *Arts* (2020: Vol 9, no. 4:102.) P.4

[12] Reardon (2021), p. The typical DRPG template that CDPR use was inherited from game development successes by their predecessors, BioWare, Bethesda and the original RPG developers Dungeons and Dragons. P.13-44, The template is defined as "a rich game narrative with several opportunities for players to make

thought video games were stupid, [sic],[13] he did not believe in the project and wanted money upfront. He also wanted CDPR to create their own stories with the characters he had created, not adapt the books already told but rather use the diegesis with all its characters as settings and tools.

In 2007 the game was released, that same year the first English-language translation of Sapkowski's stories were published.

In short, Sapkowski's name helped market the game to Polish audiences, and the game helped market Sapkowski's books to an international audience. CDPR's game, The Witcher, was a success.[14] But they achieved this partly by answering to player feedback in very direct ways. They launched an enhanced edition of The Witcher for PC users, for free, in which they fixed issues that players had with the first edition. Furthermore, they dropped a toolkit, allowing players to create their own side-quests for Geralt.[15] This strategy built a strong relationship to the studio's audience, but it also set the studio up for future struggles, when the audience expected the same amount of input and control into future CDPR projects.

In comparison, Sapkowski is not as popular among the fans of the games, since some of them find it hard to forgive him for his statements that he does not play games because he still thinks "it is stupid" [sic].[16]

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moral and ethical choices that would affect the game's plot, complex and engaging NPC[non-playable-characters] companions with whom the player-character could develop friendships or romance, and a detailed world rich in history." p.92

[13] Purchese, Robert. Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the writer who created The Witcher: Does he really hate games?. In *Eurogamer,* 2017-03-25 (Accessed 2023-08-09)
"Sapkowski continues: 'I agreed they would write a completely new story using my characters, my ontology of this crazy world. But they would create completely new stories. I said, 'Why not? Please, please, show how good you are.' Simply, he didn't think it would amount to much. He thought games were stupid, had done ever since shooting Martians on an old console plugged into a TV. 'OK let's play cards or let's drink vodka,' he said back then, 'but killing Martians is stupid. And my standpoint stands: it is stupid.'" [---] "In many ways he lives up to his reputation then, but in other ways he surprises me too. Contrary to popular belief he claims actually not to hate video games at all. 'It is not that I don't like them, that I despise them,' he says. Hang on, didn't you just call games 'stupid'? 'I just don't play them! But I have *nothing* against games, I have *nothing* against gamers. Nothing.'"

[14] Reardon (2021), p.123-127.

[15] Reardon (2021), p.126f

[16] R/wiedzmin, Witcher thread on Reddit about fans thoughts on Sapkowski. [accessed 2023-08-09) https://www.reddit.com/r/wiedzmin/comments/q6esl8/why_do_rwitcher_and_rnetflixwitcher_hate/

To Sapkowski's defence, CDPR was not the first studio to try and adapt The Witcher into a video game. He had sold the rights once already, which never led to a finished product.[17] Before that, he had also tried to adapt the novels into comic books that eventually flopped.[18] He had no reason to believe that CDPR's project would be any different.

CDPR released two more games, The Witcher 2: Assassin of kings[19] in 2011, and The Witcher 3: Wild hunt in 2015, which was a massive hit.[20] Today they are one of the top studios of the world, known for their AAA[21] game releases.

Sapkowski continued to write another Witcher novel in 2013, and the English translations of his books were continuously released yearly.

In 2019 Netflix released season one of their new adaption of the Witcher franchise, "The Witcher." The producers made it clear from the beginning that they were mainly interested in adapting the books that Sapkowski wrote, not CDPR's DRPG's.[22]

This might be because Sapkowski was, by the time the tv series was released, finishing a legal process with CDPR whom he had sued. CDPR translated Sapkowski's letter in which he demands more money and published it on their website.[23] This hurt the audiences view of Sapkowski further and made him seem greedy. And CDPR, who claimed that they wanted to settle things amicable,

[17] Purchese, Robert. The witcher game that never was, Made in Poland but not by CD Projekt Red.[sic] *Eurogamer.* 2015 (from their archives, it was originally published in 2014) https://www.eurogamer.net/the-witcher-game-that-never-was [accessed 2023-08-09]
[18] Gawroński, (2020), P.3
[19] Reardon (2021) p.173-179.
[20] Reardon (2021) p.232-240.
[21] Reardon (2021), "AAA games – those digital games made by the industry's largest studios. The industry's AAA digital games studios, which employs anywhere between 180 people (Bethesda softworks) and 13,000 (Ubisoft), now operate with budgets in the millions, with production costs also in the millions. As of 2021, the year of this book's completion, AAA game design has become something of a zero-sum game. With budgets in the tens of millions, companies are one critical review away from financial catastrophe." P.4
[22] Steve Varley Show. Lauren Schmidt Hissrich [Showrunner of The Witcher on Netflix]– Interview. "I don't feel the need to go beyond the existing books. They are great source material, Andrzej Sapkowski has written all of them, there is a natural ending to them and I feel like as long as we stick that landing, which is the ending of the books, then we'll be good."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MIilUYoLuM&ab_channel=SteveVarleyShow (Accessed 2023-08-09)
[23] CDPRs webpage, where they announce the legal dispute. From 2018. [accessed 2023-08-09]
https://www.cdprojekt.com/en/investors/regulatory-announcements/current-report-no-15-2018/

succeeded in looking like the more reasonable party in the dispute. The two did settle the dispute with a new licensing agreement in 2019.[24]

Sapkowski made claims that although the games did him a great service in popularizing his books among audiences. They have also made his life harder as an author, since people keep believing that his books are adaptions of the game, and not the other way around.[25][26]

There are several different groups of fans that take part in discourse about The Witcher. There are the polish readers that remember the books and that love to see their history and culture represented in the books. But who take issue with how the books were translated to a global audience. They seek to conserve and protect the Polishness of the books.[27] With a growing national-conservatism in the country[28], this issue remain even as the years have gone by.

There are the readers of the English language fantasy books, who partake in writing fanfiction and running book-tube channels on YouTube (review and/or book-centric videoblogs).[29]

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[24] Hall, Charlie. The Witcher author and CD Project end royalties dispute with licensing agreement: Previously the author had demanded $16 million in royalties. In *Polygon* 2019. [Accessed 2023-08-09] https://www.polygon.com/2019/12/20/21032021/the-witcher-author-cd-projekt-legal-battle-royalties-new-contract

[25] Purchese, Robert. Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the writer who created The Witcher, does he really hate games? "It [CDPR's DRPG's] muddied the waters, making the distinction between game and author less clear. Not a problem in Poland, where Sapkowski was a household name, but to English audiences, where he wasn't published until 2008... 'It was f***ing bad for me,' he says.
As CD Project Red's star rose with each game released, the problem worsened. Take a look at the covers of the English books now and see for yourself. You can imagine why someone would mistakenly ask Sapkowski if he was the guy writing books about the games. 'It happened,' he says. 'It happened. I can remember my reaction: I know many bad words and I used all of them, in many languages.'
'In 20 years,' he says, 'somebody will ask, 'Witcher, the game - and who's the author?' No one will know. '*Somebody*,' they'll say. I get the impression it is his greatest fear."

[26] See appendix PNG: sapkowski selling new book, covers of game material in thumbnail.png

[27] Gawroński, (2020) p. 3f

[28] Schwenck, Anna. Conservative national narratives in Poland, Russia and Hungary. 'We are the norm!' in *BalticWorlds* (BW 2021:3 pp76-80) Published on Balticworlds.com 2021. " New conservatives claim that the Polish economy and society are in need of moral renewal. The 1990s are portrayed by the governing party PiS ("Law and Justice") as a time of decline. In the light of this apparent decline, Polish new conservatives seek to modernize the economy according to what they call a genuine Polish-Christian benchmark. They portray Poland in analogy to a person, a subject that must regain its own personality (podmiotowość) and agency (sprawczość) in the world" https://balticworlds.com/conservative-national-narratives-in-poland-russia-and-hungary/ [Accessed 2023-08-09]

[29] One example of a booktube channel covering The Witcher books in English are Elliot Brooks https://www.youtube.com/@ebnovels/featured [Accessed 2023-08-09]

There are the seemingly younger, mainly female fans that celebrate Netflix tv show on TikTok.

There is also the gaming fandom that focus on CDPR's adaptions, they make up a very loud and very powerful presence on social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter etc. Gaming-discourse is a business generating millions upon millions of views. It should not be understated just how large this cultural activity has become. It is big enough that this discourse make up a significant part of the traffic that keeps some social platforms alive. The gamers discussion of The Witcher, a AAA-game, is one example of large discourses like that for platforms such as Reddit or Twitch etc.[30]

As mentioned earlier, this flow of activity comes at a price. CDPR and their competitors, BioWare, Bethesda, etc., have all felt the sting of when communication with fans online collapse.[31] And they have all had to adapt to meet this new "entitlement mentality" [32] that their audience has developed, as access to the developers themselves became easier, then expected, then demanded. With this new development, a culture of harassment has established itself, in which women and minorities are most often the target of the vitriol and violence. This harassment is continuously nourished by the belief and experience, in the fandom, that they are not being heard enough. As Reardon and Wright describe, it is like they return to the old roots of tabletop RPGs, with the player arguing with their DM [Dungeon Master, the one that arranges and controls the game in the original, analog, RPGs.][33] Dungeons and Dragons [owned by Hasbro) provide guidance to its players on how to resolve this. (Usually, it is whatever the DM says that is considered law.) But, without any such guides or policies, a mob mentality among fandoms discussing videogames and perhaps DRPGs especially, has become pervasive on spaces such as YouTube.[34]

[30] Reardon,(2021) p.36-38
[31] Reardon, (2021) p.127-132, p.148, p.151-173. P.203-215.
[32] Reardon, (2021) p.76f
[33] Reardon, (2021) p.183-186
[34] Reardon, (2021) p.252.

This is the audience that Netflix seek to please with its adaption, but it is an audience that not even CDPR could maintain a good and healthy relationship with.

CDPR released Thronebreaker[35] in 2018. A smaller strategy game set in the same world as the rest of their Witcher adaptations. In 2019 things started to crumble for CDPR as their development of their next title, Cyberpunk 2077, struggled. And the release was an absolute disaster.[36]

Every statement made through social media by the studios in question, the authors working there or the producers marketing their product – become paratexts[37] so convoluted that the line between original text and paratext become intangible for most audiences.[38] And yet, speaking into the void doesn't mean that one is actually heard, or can control how they are being heard. But even so, they have to remain in close contact with fans regardless of their position in order to maintain the fans perceived control over the narrative: the game itself, how it is produced and who gets to contribute to it. As Reardon and Wright concludes, rather bitterly, in their book on the history of these studios: The gaming studios of today live in constant fear of the ever-present fan which they themselves have empowered.[39]

To counteract this bleak conclusion, other DRPGs should be mentioned that have not ended up the same way as the three AAA-studios mentioned. For instance, there are the independent or semi-independent productions such as Pathfinder[40] or the recent Baldur's Gate 3.[41] In the case of Pathfinder, it was funded by fans[42], meaning there is an incentive for fans to not want the production to fail, because if it does, they have themselves lost their investment. With Baldur's Gate 3, the studio released the game early, testing the game with a motivated and voluntary test-audience for three years before actually launching the game. Which strengthens the feeling of

[35] Reardon, (2021) p.273.
[36] Reardon, (2021) p. 275-277.
[37] Paratexts, from Gerard Genette, "texts that prepare us for other texts." There is no text without paratexts. Gray, Jonathan. Show sold separately, Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts. New York: New York university press, 2010. P.25
[38] Reardon, (2021) p.48-49
[39] Reardon, (2021) p.277.
[40] Pathfinder: Wrath of the righteous. Owlcat Games, 2021. [Videogame] https://owlcat.games/ [Accessed 2023-08-10)
[41] Baldur's Gate 3, Larian studios, 2023. [Videogame] https://baldursgate3.game/ [Accessed 2023-08-10]
[42] The Kickstarter for Pathfinder https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/owlcatgames/pathfinder-wrath-of-the-righteous [Accessed 2023-08-10]

control, closeness and contribution the same way that CDPR did with their enhanced edition. However, as of the writing of this essay the game has only been out for a week and we cannot draw any conclusions from it and any future consequences of the studios strategy at this point.

In this chaos, this essay seek to understand what originator is given what authority, what fandom is given what value, what text (or paratext) is given what importance in a constant battle online for hegemony. In this discourse burns a deeper joy and/or displeasure with social change, especially when Netflix casts minority actors in roles otherwise portrayed as white in videogames. The place and portrayal of female characters in the story is another major concern harboured by this audience.

In 1992, Henry Jenkins reflected upon the change in power dynamics, when fans become active instead of being a passive audience.[43] This idea has established itself among academics, in fan studies, film studies, communications and cultural studies. However, in this seminal text from 1992 Jenkins also believed that the fan understood that their relationship to the text "remains a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer's own efforts to regulate its meanings. […] they [the fans] are also acutely and painfully aware that those fictions do not belong to them and that someone else has the power to do things to those characters that are in direct contradiction to the fans' own cultural interests."[44] This clear line and understanding seem to be the same one that Reardon and Wright argue have been erased.

In this essay I hope to use both these hopeful ideas about fandom, and the pessimistic ones, and offer a dimensional analysis on the case which I have chosen.

[43] Jenkins, Henry. *Textual poachers, Television fans & Participatory Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1992. P.24

[44] Jenkins. (1992) p.24

1.3 Research question and Purpose Statement

Q: What tension exists in hegemonic consent and resistance among the online reception of Netflix adaption of The Witcher books?

Q: What social and/or technical processes enables those tensions?

The purpose of this essay is to map out what hegemonic struggles exist within the case chosen, in order to understand the dynamics online in fan-discourse, and to contextualize this situation and paint a picture of what it might mean for future fandom and reception studies.

1.4 Theory

1.4.1 Transmedia

Transmedia was first used as Transmedia intertextuality, it was used to describe media that moved from one platform to another. Such as cartoons that became games, or games that became cartoons. Henry Jenkins further developed the concept with his use of convergence culture, which, compared to Transmedia intertextuality, brought the different media texts closer together:[45]

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systemically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.[46]

The Witcher franchise is very clearly an example of Transmedia storytelling. It could also be called a franchise-transmedia, even if its development is very different from other

[45] Phillips, Andrea. "What is transmedia, anyway?" in *A creator's guide to transmedia storytelling.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012. P.14
[46] Phillips (2012) p.15

franchises that fall within that category, such as The Avengers or Batman etc.[47] Their stories all weave into one another to some degree. Each piece of the franchise can usually be consumed on its own without making you feel like you lost something, but they invite the audience to continue across different mediums.

There are other versions of this phenomena, but that are usually limited in time. Such as the marketing for The Blair Witch Project, which moved closer to what could almost be called online performance art, or at least: an online performance event.[48] With the movie Barbie, we are perhaps seeing a type of melding of the two styles.

Interconnectedness between different mediums isn't new, as Elizabeth Evans explain in her text on Transmedia and television - transmediality has been a notion known to television for a long time and the theory used to explain it isn't new. [49] Evans uses case studies performed by John Caldwell to explain transmedia using: flow.[50] The audience can move between watching TV, to ordering merchandise connected to what they are watching, to reading about characters from the show in magazines. This creates a coherent narrative, but the different platforms also serve to encourage the audience to return to the TV again. Instead of a network, Caldwell choses to talk about a flow as the flow puts the audience and their choices in focus.[51] In this essay, a lot of these texts that create flow will be referred to as paratexts – such as gossip and articles about actors and characters.

Evans moves on, citing John Ellis as he states that television is, fundamentally, a medium that belongs at home. A domestic medium. Because of this the audience doesn't have to concentrate as much, and the specific room that is the cinema is removed. Audiences watch tv as they clean, eat, hang out with their family. "as a result, he argues, viewers do not 'gaze' at the screen as they would do in the cinema, but instead 'glance' at the television set as their attention is drawn elsewhere.[52]

[47] Phillips. (2012) P.13f
[48] Laman, Lisa. "How 'The Blair witch project' changed movie marketing" on Collider.com 2022-12-30 [accessed 2023-08-10] https://collider.com/blair-witch-project-marketing-campaign/
[49] Evans, Elizabeth. "Transmedia Television, Flow, Glance, and the BBC." In *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies.* New York: Routledge, 2018. P.35
[50] Evans (2018) p.36
[51] Evans (2018) p.37
[52] Evans (2018) p.38

As Evans explain, the notion that no one watches tv attentively has been argued. But with the emergence of transmediality into this discussion, especially as portable devices become an option, the use of gaze/glance is again relevant. In February this year, J.D. Connor applied a similar thought onto Netflix, and how they fight to find franchises that allow for the audience to "either lean in further or go along for the ride."[53]

When discussing transmedia storytelling, adaption is usually excluded.[54] Therefore, the DRPGs made by CDPR are transmedia storytelling – because Sapkowski wouldn't allow them to retell his stories but asked that they continue the story instead. Usually, a line is drawn between adaptions that are considered redundant, and Transmedia storytelling, which is supposed to add to the story.[55]

The Hexer, the movie from 2001, and the tv show from 2002, are mostly adaptions but also partly transmedia storytelling. This because they contain key scenes from the books which are more or less directly translated. But, they also contain things that never existed in the books or the games, such as characters and plot points etc. The Witcher standalone novel, Sezon Burz or Season of storms – is arguably transmedia. In that it reads more like a melding of the characters and stories that are in CDPRs DRPGs, than the characters and stories that Sapkowski wrote before the games were released. It also seems like many that arrived at the franchise through the DRPG's prefer that novel compared to Sapkowski's others. Perhaps it's because of its similarity to the DRPG's: It follows Geralt and Geralt only, the plot is structured like a fetch-quest.[56] Geralt is more interested in pursuing women that he come across during this adventure, which is emblematic of the DRPG where the player can have sex with a multitude of female NPC's. The first game even included a deck of sex-cards with partially clothed or unclothed women, which Geralt would receive like an achievement or reward, when the player had sex with any of the female NPC's. Almost like the game suggest

[53] Connor, John d. "Going Klear: A Glass Onion Franchise in the Wild" in *LARB.* 2023-02-09 https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/going-klear-a-glass-onion-franchise-in-the-wild/ [Accessed 2023-06-04]
[54] Dena, Christy. "Transmedia adaption, Revisiting the No-adaptation Rule" in *The Routledge Companion to Transmedia Studies.* New York: Routledge, 2018. P.195-206
[55] Dena (2018) p.195f
[56] A fetch-quest is a quest given in a videogame where the player is asked to go get something. It could be a lost sword in a cave with a monster. In this case, Geralt looses his swords because of bureaucracy, and struggles to get them back.

the player should collect all the women, through sex, to complete their deck.[57] Sapkowski's books feature seduction, sex and desire, but not to that extent and not in that manner.

Netflix's other Witcher shows, their Anime movie and their spin-off tv-shows, are all transmedia. However, like The Hexer – they contain scenes from Sapkowski books but, the characters are changed or the situation is entirely different but the scene itself is in some way loosely inspired by the books. There also exist graphic novels which are adaptions of the short stories, and are not transmedia storytelling. There is also The Witcher: Ronin. A manga, with Geralt but not in The Witcher world but instead featured as a Japanese samurai in Edo-era Japan. It is written by Rafal Jaki, who wrote the DRPG's for CDPR. It is hard to say if it would qualify as an adaption or transmedia storytelling, it doesn't add anything but it doesn't repeat anything either. It's an outlier and will not be part of the reception study.

The scope of The Witcher franchise and its product challenges this line between transmedia storytelling and adaptation. Especially as we consider that no adaptation could ever be simply a translation of another piece of media. As text moves into visual media, choices must be made, like casting of an actor.[58] Or, portraying a character's inner monologue through other means. This, in turn, will change the text. In this sense, even the Netflix tv show could arguably move closer to transmedia storytelling than adaptation. For the purposes of this essay, the Netflix tv show is considered an adaption.

Second screen companion apps are yet another development of transmedia, another paratextual installation that, when applied strategically, help the studio guide the gaze of the audience.[59] Netflix has this too: Netflix Tudum, which hosts information about the shows that the studio produce.[60] Second screen companions help the studio acquire information on audience behaviour away from the television.[61]

However, audiences might seek out that information elsewhere.

[57] Reardon (2021) p.126
[58] Stam, Robert. "*Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaption,"* in James Naremore, ed., Film Adaptation (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000). P.54f
[59] Evans (2018) p.38
[60] Tudum [Website] https://www.netflix.com/tudum [Accessed 2023-08-10]
[61] Evans (2018) p.38

1.4.2 Convergence culture

Henry Jenkins writes: "Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways."[62] The concept involves the voluntary involvement and participation of the audience – participatory culture.

Jenkins emphasizes that the development of transmedia and convergence culture is about more than technological development, it is about the way the audience chose to interact with it. The audience is not passive, but they "work and play"[63] in completely new media systems. Within this culture there are hierarchical systems, where the participating fan is less privileged than large studios such as Disney or Netflix. In this early edition of the theory, Jenkins state that even the aggregate of all fans together, are less powerful than the most powerful individuals and studios in the media sphere.[64] He also acknowledges that some consumers of media have more ways to participate than other consumers.

Convergence is what happens in the minds of the participants, it is not about technology but about the consumers of culture.

A consequence of this is the development of a collective intelligence that the participants may share and use as a source of power.[65] This behaviour, of collecting and sharing knowledge, occurs because the knowledge about the text itself becomes too much for any individual to hold all on their own.[66] Jenkins states that fans must be careful in their collection of information, as they might otherwise disperse disinformation into their collective database of knowledge.[67] Jenkins cites Pierre Lévy, and explains that with this knowledge the unified participants, the fans, can then challenge "the hegemony of the nation-state or the economic might of corporate capitalism."[68] In an utopian outcome, this

[62] Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture, where old and new media collide.* New York: New York University Press, 2006. P.2
[63] Jenkins (2006) p.3
[64] Jenkins (2006) p.3
[65] Jenkins (2006) p.4, 29.
[66] Jenkins (2006) p.27f
[67] Jenkins (2006) p.28
[68] Jenkins (2006) p.29

might serve to "breaking down the divisions and suspicions that currently shape international relations."[69]

In the book *Popular culture and the Civic Imagination*[70] Many instances of creative social change such as that are described. Bell Hook describes: "It's exciting to think, write, talk about, and create art that reflects passionate engagement with popular culture, because this may well be 'the' central future location of resistance struggle, a meeting place where new and radical happenings can occur. [---] black people in particular, but also all marginalized groups, 'yearn' for alternative forms of popular culture that more fully express their fantasies of social change."[71] Especially for many young people, popular culture is an important source for the civic imagination.[72]

However, the tactics described in this book, that are meant to use convergence culture and fandom to create social change – are also used by antidemocratic powers. And the book lacks strategies for what to do when the theoretical framework and language of cultural studies are turned back on its head and are utilized against them.[73] However, this tactic, to use a cultural space for something different, such as activism, has been done many times before digitalization.[74]

The active participation of audiences shouldn't be overstated, of course, many audiences are passive and do not strive to do fan-work. However, it is still important that those audiences don't feel locked out of participating.[75]

[69] Jenkins (2006) p.29
[70] Jenkins, Henry (Editor.) Peters-Lazaro, Gabriel. Shresthova, Sangita. *Popular culture and the civic imagination, case studies of creative social change.* New York: New York university press, 2020.
[71] Jenkins (2020) p.9
[72] Jenkins (2020) p.15
[73] For instance, in the chapter "training activists to be fans" (p.186-194) Stephen Duncombe describe how fandom spaces can be used for other things. How one might, strategically, sneak in discourse on social change in those spaces, to learn to become a fan, in order to mobilize the fans. This is a tactic that can be used by anyone with any intention.
[74] Jenkins, Henry. Ford, Sam. Green, Joshua. *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture.* New York:NYU, 2013. p.173
[75] Jenkins, (2013) P.154f

Another characteristic of convergence culture is that it turns against the pathologization of fandom, and of transmedia. The fan is not a fanatic locked in the attic.[76] As Janet Staiger, paraphrasing Joli Jensen, states in her book on Media reception studies:

> Pathologizing fans is a questionable representational move, pointing out that fans are contrasted unfavourably against academics and "aficionados or collectors" on the basis of the object of investment. Such binary thinking produces a stigmatization or a scapegoat, allowing some parts of the population to feel safe. She points out the "inherently conservative" elitism in this opposition.[77]

Furthermore, the viral isn't a mysterious biological monster. It is a cultural phenomena that can and should be studied and understood.[78]

Fans, as a group, have historically, and still are in many cases, marginalized and this is why they struggle to be heard.[79] However, they have also learned to leverage their collective knowledge and influence, in order to approach and negotiate with producers of their favourite shows.[80]

However, as Jenkins stresses: "Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is an added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume."[81]

For audiences that arrived at a franchise through DRPGs, these bits and fragments of information will be extraordinarily varied, which makes any adaption attempt all the more difficult – since little consensus exist on plot and characters.

Jenkins prefer to focus on the positive aspects of fandom and convergence culture, but with the events described by Reardon and Wright, mainly GamerGate (which started as a

[76] Jenkins (2006) p.12
[77] Staiger, Janet. Media reception studies. New York: New York university press, 2005. P.96
[78] Jenkins, (2013) p.18f
[79] Jenkins, (2013) p.161-166
[80] Jenkins, (2013) p.155f
[81] Jenkins. 2006. p.4

backlash to MassEffect, one of BioWare's DRPGs), Jenkin does admit that fandoms have become cultures of abuse and harassment as well, and this has had a great impact on society outside of the fandoms that partook in the events themselves.[82]

1.4.3 Gramsci, Hegemony and Media Literacy.

Gramsci's notebooks have been interpreted in more than one way throughout the years and there is not one conclusive reading that dominates above the others, this because it is with subsequent interpretations that Gramsci's work grew into the set of ideas that it is today.[83] Gramsci starts with one issue: how the socialist movement failed in 1920s Italy. In this process, he identified the existence of a different type of power that stood in the way of social change: egemonia, or hegemony. This concept is a recurring theme that ties all his works together.[84]

> Hegemony refers to the unquestioned dominance of a social group, or configuration of social groups within a society, resulting from its ability to maintain power indirectly through the implicit approval of non-dominant groups.[85]

Hegemony is about macro-level power. The direct power which the state enforces – dominion, and the indirect power the civil society enforces - egemonia or hegemony. "The state refers to 'political society,' and its power becomes enforced through law and government. Gramsci further defined civil society as the 'ensembles of organisms commonly called 'private.'"[86]

[82]Jenkins, Henry. (ed.) Popular culture & the civic imagination: "who and what belongs: #gamergate and Abjection" (1 of 2) From his blog, *Confessions of an aca-fan*. 25-03-2020. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2020/3/19/popular-culture-amp-the-civic-imagination-who-and-what-belongs-gamergate-and-abjection-1-of-2-by-steven-proudfoot-amp-joan-miller (Accessed. 03-06-2022.)

[83] Engstrom (2021) p.7

[84] Engstrom (2021) p.8

[85] Engstrom (2021) p.1

[86] Enstrom (2021) p.8

Citing Mumby, Engstrom defines Civil society as something which "comprises the fabric of society that interweaves aspects of everyday life, such as the education system, religion, the family, and mass media. Hegemony 'involves the production of a worldview, inclusive of a philosophical and moral outlook' that allied groups within civil society actively support."[87]

The dominance of this civil society is not necessarily something that is enforced upon social groups, but rather a cooperative system that social groups agree upon.[88] With mass communication and social media being large parts of many people's lives, the theory regarding social change, as described by Gramsci, need further revisiting.

Stuart Hall wrote of hegemony "In modern societies, hegemony must be constructed, contested and won on many different sites, as the structures of the modern state and society complexify and the points of social antagonism proliferate. [---] Gramsci understands that politics is a much expanded field; that, especially in societies of our kind, the sites on which power is constituted will be enormously varied."[89] For this reason, Engstrom choses to move into Media Literacy when talking about Gramsci and Hegemony. She gives the following definition on media literacy:

> Media literacy refers to the ability of media consumers to understand and identify the modes of media production and consider the purposes and meanings of media content.[90]

The two concepts go together in a world filled with social media, because without media literacy we can never, challenge, question, or even perceive of hegemony on those platforms.

Engstrom applies Gramsci to analyse mass media and how it "Help ['s] to keep cultural ideologies in place while simultaneously absorbing intrusions into those ideologies that challenge or threaten them."[91] And, by extending that research into studies of audiences,

[87] Engstrom (2021) p.8
[88] Engström (2021) p.9
[89] Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci and us" in The hard road to renewal, thatcherism and the crisis of the left. New York: Verso, 1988. P.168
[90] Engstrom (2021) p.2
[91] Engstrom (2021) p.2

and how they form cultural norms and "perpetuate notions of 'common sense' consented to in everyday life, while [they are] also seeing this as the battle between alternative explanations of the meanings of media experiences."[92] Engstrom states that the field of reception studies and studies of audience would become richer if we examined this tension between what the audience consent to, or resist, and how it serves to form power structures online.

Engstrom, leaning on Gramsci and his notion of organic intellectuals, states that anyone can be an intellectual "and agent of change through media literacy."[93]The role of intellectual is one that can both be an "arbiter" of hegemonic thought, but they could also be agents that bring critical thought and awareness to fans, and audiences. With the tools provided by media literacy the audience can question the unquestionable, called 'common sense.'

When discussing counterhegemonies, that is to say – alternatives to the common-sense way to look at things, become widespread and normalized enough, a new and revised hegemony is formed.[94] But this process is one that takes place inside of the group and/or culture in question, it cannot be enforced upon them. [95]

1.5 Methodology

This essay utilizes two qualitative methods, two modes, in which one informs the other.

Firstly, data about audience reception online was collected and got sorted into mayor themes and issues. Secondly, the social groups and their media got further studied in order to be contextualized.

To collect the data for this essay a new google account and google mail was created. This was to make sure that no previous activity in the systems browser could manipulate algorithmic search results and suggestions. This is an approximation, as it is yet unknown exactly how search engines such as google collect data from their users, and how they

[92] Engstorm (2021) p.2
[93] Engstrom (2021) p.3
[94] Engstrom (2021) p.12
[95] Ensgtrom (2021) p.13

create search results and suggestions based on that information. This method is therefore limited by this restriction of information. As this essay will point out in the conclusion, this extra step was probably unnecessary, as recommendations for material about the studied case flooded other accounts used as well.

The material chosen for this essay is the material mainly suggested by the algorithm, that is, the social platform pushed those results to the foreground when searching for keywords such as “The Witcher,” “Witcher,” “Sapkowski,” etc. the videos found get watched, and any references that video does to other material that the creator feel are relevant, are also watched. If commenters in the video bring up more material, usually paratexts, or reference fan-sources, those texts are also studied.

At the start of this essay, the main goal was to try and find different social groups on YouTube, such as female fans and queer fans etc. To break up the response on that platform. However, after the release of Season 3 of The Witcher, discourse and controversy exploded on YouTube and flooded the platform. It became hard to find outliers, smaller social groups within the fandom or any non-hegemonic response to the discourse.

In order to find different voices this essay made use of TikTok for a smaller sample, but the main issues discussed in this essay will be from the ones collected from YouTube in the growing media storm surrounding the Netflix show.

The videos that are picked are analysed in regards to where they position themselves in the discourse, and what language they make use of in that discourse. Sample comments from the comment-section of the visual material will be described and/or cited.

1.5.1 The acafan position

Acafan is a term coined by Henry Jenkins, describing a “hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic.”[96] He does this because his ambition is to try and mitigate the impact an

[96] Williams, Rebecca. A Fan studies Primer: Method, Research, Ethics. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2021. [Kindle edition] p.3f

academics fan-status might have on their scholarly activities, as well as serving to break down the hierarchical boundary between the scholar and their scholarly subjects – the fans.

The term comes with its own issues, such as limiting what type of fandoms get studied. If the fandom need to be one that also would attract academics, then what about fandoms that don't tend to do that? Will they never be studied?

In her handbook on fan studies, Rebecca William cite Coker and Benefiel.[97]

> Academics are doing themselves and their scholarship a disservice by denying their own fandom or thinking they can write about fandom without actually being fans. The question is still occasionally raised whether the fan academic can function objectively as a scholar while concurrently in an atmosphere of deep engagement with other fans. Is it possible or even necessary to maintain critical distance from a text while simultaneously discussing it with deep affection and even love?
>
> The question, then, is not whether the engagement of an aca-fan is appropriate in the study of cultural production, but how can the critical study of any text succeed without the passionate and knowledgeable participation of the scholar?

Williams then develops this reasoning:

> As Coker and Benefiel argue, expertise is expected in any field, but then, as now, the parameters of "expertise" are fuzzy. Given that we often still struggle with the definition of "fan," and may disagree on what constitutes being a "good enough fan," can we say with any certainty what "expertise" looks like?[98]

What Coker and Benefiel completely disregard in their expectation of the acafan, is a very basic security measure. If a person is part of a fandom, loving it and the text that they congregate around, then that person has a lot to lose should they publish something antihegemonic to that group. Things such as personal safety and the safety of your loved

[97] Coker, Catherine, and Candace Benefiel. "We Have Met the Fans, and They Are Us: In Defense of Aca-Fans and Scholars." Flow, December 2010. http://flowtv.org/2010/12/we-have-met-the-fans/
[98] Williams (2021) p. 87

ones,[99] relationships with friends that are also fans, your career as fans might seek to violently deplatform a critical voice.[100][101]

That critic can only, and remain safe in their beloved space, affirm the group and its culture in their research and avoid any true struggles or sensitivities.

Research that stick to what a social group is comfortable with, is still valuable, is still valid; especially in marginalized groups who do not get their perspective studied that often. Fandoms used to be such a group. But, this cannot be the one and only strategy of academic efforts when fan-activities are concerned, like Coker and Benefiel argues. And it is an inappropriate method for a fandom such as the English language Witcher fandom – since it is a fandom that does not struggle with being heard on social platforms and/or in mass media reporting on popular culture.

We live constantly under the influence of strategic narratives.[102] Basic defence against what could be disinformation is to dare question the motivation behind behaviours even if they seem to cater to the interests that you care about and seem to be coming from someone from your own social/cultural/political group. If it costs the acafan too much to ask these questions, then they will be susceptible to radicalization, the same way that all people are susceptible to it.[103] However, with their academic credibility, the acafan might do greater damage by giving academic and scientific weight to strategic narratives they never would have intended to, but they got manipulated to act against their own best interests. Such as, validating a conspiracy theory that thrives in a fandom, with the intent to defend

[99] Williams (2021) p.
[100] Feminist Frequency "The end of feminist Frequency featuring Anita Sarkeesian and Jae Lin FFR 239" [YouTube Video/ podcast]]https://youtu.be/ShWwLWM30-w 00:22:00
[101] Anita Sarkeesian on how they came to shut down their project (the YouTube channel Feminist Frequency) after 14 years of discussing media and harassment online, interviewing victims of harassment etc. Anita says: "While times have changed and clearly the work that we did has had a huge impact, like people are still afraid of me. Like they are still afraid of being associated with me. Some people, not most people but some people right." 00:22:45
[102] "Strategic narratives are a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate. […] The point of strategic narratives is to influence the behavior of others." From O'Loughlin, Ben & Miskimmon, Alister & Roselle, Laura. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Doi 10.4324/9781315871264.
[103] Engstrom (2021) P.3

democratic freedom and the fandoms right to be heard – but in the end only feeding into anti-democratic narratives that aim to limit that freedom.

Therefor, in todays cultural and political climate, I suggest, (with some reservations,) treating the acafan position like Susan Sontag did, when writing her notes on camp:

> To talk about Camp is therefore to betray it. If the betrayal can be defended, it will be for the edification it provides, or the dignity of the conflict it resolves. For myself, I plead the goal of self-edification, and the goad of a sharp conflict in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can. For no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyse it; he can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion.[104]

To talk about fandom in an academic way is to betray it, like a gossiping little sister running off to tell your parents about something a sibling has been doing. Except, we do it because we have a conflict, an issue, a phenomenon to discover, to understand and to resolve. We tend to be academics and critics for a reason, probably that we love film or media or games or any other culture. But it also requires that we love the analytical. Being a fan of the analysis itself is also a motivational love that academics can fall back on. A polyamory is preferred, where this love of critical thinking and academic methods and search for understanding, can and should be used to temper feelings of love and hatred of cultural texts.

Whatever the acafan does, it is mainly their voice that is being heard, not any others. This hierarchical structure cannot be deconstructed so easily. Williams reaches the same conclusion, after having tried to represent others, and trying to keep her privileged academic voice less present. But in the end the efforts are futile, the academics cannot ever, truly, erase themselves.[105] As academics we must admit our influence, and do our work well. We must try to mitigate our biases with an appropriate method, that might undo some

[104] Sontag, Susan. "*Notes on 'camp,'"* in Rieff, David (Ed.), Susan Sontag, Essays of the 1960s & 70s, New York, Literary classics of the united states, Inc. 2013 (originally published in 1961-1966), P.259
[105] Williams. (2021) p. 87f.

of the damage any biases might have. We must be good colleagues to each other and provide feedback. We must dare to seek feedback even from those that we know tend to not agree with our themes, opinions and methods. We must be careful in our citation and selection of other voices, and never misrepresent them for the whole world when they cannot ever be, and we must be transparent in all that we do so that others can interpret our research correctly and not overreach or be misled.

One part of the acafan trope within fan-studies is the description of the self. Ordinarily, we avoid bringing a personal voice into academic writing, but this part of the method breaks that rule.[106][107]

1.5.1.1 a short autoethnography

I grew up with games, especially DRPG's. I played all the games that Reardon and Wright chronicled, and I have been part of the modding communities[108] that they speak of and I have lived through many of the crises that they described. I have been a fantasy and sci fi nerd since I was a child, and I have partaken in many stereotypical fannish activities. Such as volunteering for conventions, visiting conventions, dressing up, learning Japanese and watching anime and reading manga, such as playing online with friends and arguing about Tolkien's texts with others. Such as illustrating our favourite books at lunchbreaks in school and rewriting harry potter into our own story. As the social platforms grew I engaged with them, joined nerdy forums and I run some groups like that myself at the local library (centred around writing fantasy/science fiction) and on Discord (a social platform that tend to attract gamers.) On Discord and Twitter, I have participated in fanfiction events with various fandoms – in this way I am the stereotypical DRPG fan and it is why I knew I would be able to understand The Witcher fandom, at least the English-speaking part.[109]

[106] As exemplified in this section. Williams. (2021) p. 127ff
[107] Another example by is the "introduction, confessions of an Aca/Fan" By Henry Jenkins.
Jenkins, Henry. Introduction, confessions of an Aca/Fan" in Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers. Exploring Participatory Culture. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
[108] Such as nexus mods https://www.nexusmods.com/ [accessed 2023-08-13]
[109] Reardon (2021) p.182

I do, however, not self-identify as a fan of anything. The reason for this is that the driving force behind my consumption of culture throughout all my life has been the wish to analyse that culture, and quite rarely simply participate in it. When the thing is analysed and done, I am usually no longer a "fan" and my interests tend to move forward to something else. This is a mode of cultural consumption that is not widely popular in most fandoms. A lot of fandoms tend to be sensitive about who gets to call themselves a fan. If I do not strive to gain the title of "fan" or "nerd" then I have nothing to prove about it either. And, since my interaction with culture tends to be analytical, my personal relationship with fandoms is always in flux. A lot of fandoms are intense and do not tolerate analysis of their favourite cultural thing, unless that analysis is at its core hegemonical and affirming of the media and the group somehow. It is also difficult to lean on academic knowledge or method in these situations, because the education itself comes off as particularly intimidating if I am arguing a point that they do not want to hear in those social spaces. (This is of course true of most social spaces).

I am, what the online cultures would call: terminally online. That is to say, I am always online and live with internet culture close to me all the time. That doesn't mean that every online culture is accessible or understandable to me, but it does mean that I am aware of a lot of online communities and where they go for their activities and what they tend to do. This is an international world, but that is mainly English-speaking. And to me it seems like paratexts converge into text in the minds of a lot of audiences every day, leading to reactions that sometimes seem extremely out of proportion, which both frustrates and fascinates me. This behaviour is usually defended by claiming the title of "fan." By stating that one is a fan, every action is deemed an act of love, no matter how creative and free, or violent and malicious, that action is. This behaviour seeps into other cultures, such as gamer-culture commenting on tv-shows or film-adaptions. This makes me question what love and closeness mean to a lot of online cultures today.

Furthermore, there seem to me like a lot of liminal spaces are being challenged today, with fans throwing things on stage hurting their favourite artist[110] or arguing with their favourite

[110] Cardi B: Why are fans throwing things on stage? on BBC.com 2023-08-01 (Webpage) [Accessed 2023-08-10] https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-66085967

artist when the artist isn't affirming their parasocial relationship.[111] This is why I am motivated to do this type of study, it is an interest for the world that drives it more than any fandom status. But I am not living isolated from fandom either and Coker and Benefiel would probably demand that I identify as a fan, which I stubbornly refuse to do.

As for The Witcher franchise: I didn't play the games because I thought they were sexist. I didn't want to collect sex-cards. I did however play The Witcher 3 eventually. I liked it but it was not my favourite game. I was, however, inspired by the mere fact that a Polish franchise could reach this far, and Sapkowski as a person interested me. He is a person that made strong political statements through his art, at a point in time when that type of act would have come with a price, a price that he is still paying – this I admire. I have been to Poland a few times and have many friends from there, I've even been to the film-museum in Łódź, which is the birthplace of Sapkowski (not the museum, the town). I didn't read the books until about a year ago when I thought I might be doing this study. I haven't played The Witcher 1 and 2, I only watched online playthroughs[112] of them. I have mixed feelings about all the Witcher products, and about all the authors involved in all of the projects within the franchise. I do not love nor hate them as they are, but they do fascinate me. As a case-study in transmedia, it seems perfect.

1.5.2 Netnography - On the virtues of lurking like a creep

Williams cites Costello, McDermott and Wallace when she defines what netnography is:

> Netnography offers a specific set of analytic approaches and processes applicable across a spectrum of online involvement, while the focus on gaining access to an online community also clearly distinguishes between participant observation and nonparticipant observation.

[111] Valdez, Jonah. Why Doja Cat is beefing with her fans again; these 'Kittenz' are up for adoption. In Los Angeles Times. 2023-06-24

[112] This is when a streamer plays the game and records the visuals, then edits that video material into what usually amounts to several hours of game-footage.

> In other words, netnography allows the researcher to perform observation, such as exploring what topics are trending and histories of a specific fandom by following social media platforms.[113]

And, Nonparticipant observation, lurking, is (in this context) a way to gage safety for the researcher and for the data while performing a netnography.[114]

This essay analyses digital material uploaded to the platform YouTube, and to some extent TikTok, without further interaction with the fandoms in question, a form of lurking – silent listening without participating actively in discussion. At a glance, this might seem unfair but depending on what behaviours and habits a social group might exhibit, it is necessary from a safety perspective.[115]

As the material in this essay will show, and as the historical evidence has shown, it is not risk-free to comment on online culture, especially not DRPG spaces, and especially not as a woman. If a study like this were to be done with the researcher being active and involved with the fandom, a completely different set of strategies would be needed. Such as constructing an identity to use online for the purpose of interacting with audiences, and then study the culture that way.

But, even so, because the essay is not published under a pseudonym it is then dangerous to publish that research after the fact. For instance, researchers such as Julia Ebner, who surveys violent communities such as incels and Q-anon, utilize constructed identities to gain access. This has not protected her from threats, and she must keep the names of her family a secret, she lives under constant threat from these groups that she has studied. Ebner, who infiltrates violent communities online, takes note of the gamer-language that they make use of. "By adopting the language of gamers, the lines between fantasy and reality become dangerously blurred among perpetrators and sympathizers." [116] It should be clear that it is not every gamer, every gamer culture, that is the issue. But rather, it is the convergence of

[113] Williams p.69
[114] Williams p.69f
[115] Williams p.70
[116] Sturges, Fiona. "Julia Ebner: 'There's an adrenaline rush in undercover work, getting inside a far-right movement' in *The guardian* 2020-02-14 [Accessed 2023-08-10] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/14/julia-ebner-theres-an-adrenaline-rush-in-undercover-work-getting-inside-a-far-right-movement-

the culture that constitutes a risk, the gamer culture being utilized in this manner hides the true intention of the speaker using this language. This in turn constitutes a risk.

Another benefit of this method is how it leaves the culture intact and undisturbed at the moment of data-collection. This mitigate the common and well known issue with interviews and questionnaires – which are (contrary to popular belief) very hard to do correctly.[117] Because, when asked questions meant for something so exotic as a study, behaviours change and the culture that one sought to measure is partly lost. When a person is photographed, they act differently, because they know that they are being watched. Even if their aim is to be genuine, it won't be the same behaviour as if there was no camera, no tool with which to measure present at all. And if someone is acting in a certain way for a strategic purpose, they might use the interview for their own benefit. Or they might completely switch their behaviour since they don't want to be scrutinized.

1.5.3 Ethics

As this project started, a multitude of media platforms were involved. But as the discourse grew in intensity, in a very short time, smaller voices became almost impossible to find. Because of this the number of platforms were limited to YouTube and TikTok. The analytical material is therefor limited to public, published, speech.

> All internet-based text showed online is considered published, with rare exceptions, such as password-protected content or closed groups on social media with guidelines on who can and cannot share data. Internet archives of the online text are, to some, akin to any archival data, not requiring consent from the creators to observe and write about it.[118]

[117] Kvale, Steinar. Brinkmann, Svend. *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009. P.30f
[118] Williams p.67

Because of this, issues of privacy are limited, as YouTube and TikTok are public platforms where material is published (in the case of my analysis) intentionally by the author of that video, compared to closed spaces where things are not published for all to access. Issues of censuring usernames are therefore not an issue, since this social platform constitutes public speech. Users utilize the platform in ways that are within their own power to decide upon, and they themselves are empowered to choose what identity they chose to have while performing that speech.
This essay aim to not reframe or manipulate the speech but link it and cite it in ways that aim to keep the message and context that the author intended well represented and explained, if it cannot be recreated intact by simply accessing the link to the published material as it stands in the public space.

Any link to any published article/video or other media where one can comment means that any person might write inappropriate things in those spaces. Things such as their own personal information or the personal information of others. If any source in the analysis for any reason does this disproportionately then they are removed from the analysis. However only the platform itself and its terms of service can and will monitor what users comment in social spaces. Time remains an aspect since comments are subject to editing and change. A video that had no such issue when it was studied for this essay, might have such comments later in time, and it might get them removed at some other point. The commentary function is a live document in the social spaces where they are available and little can be done by the academic netnographer to control, filter or alter that form of public speech.

Users must be at least thirteen years old to use YouTube. Children younger than that can use it if parents give them access. No videos apparently made and published by children will be in this essay. However, it might be very hard to know the age of the person behind a specific channel since they usually do not keep their private information easily accessible.

If a video is published, that seem to harm a specific, non-public, person. They are not in this essay and will be reported to platform admin.

In summary, videos on TikTok and YouTube will be treated as published material in the public sphere. No data is shared, that is not already shared completely, not even aggregate data and/or statistics of the data already shared.
In A Fan studies primer, Renee Ann Drouin reflect on fan studies and ethics regarding how we as scholars deal with fan created material.[119] However, she is talking about fanfiction and fanart. This essay does not republish or redistribute that type of material. It will however keep a copy of videos on a hard drive that will be kept out of the public sphere and available only upon request by readers of this study. It does not qualify as a republication or redistribution of material, and risks of it becoming a source of redistribution is low. This material will not be published elsewhere since the material is owned by the creator and not by the author of this essay.

1.5.4 Material

The Material used in this essay is very varied. The main source of data is collected through YouTube. But, as explained in the method, discourse got drowned out on YouTube as debate about The Witcher peaked with the launch of Season 3. Therefor other material have been collected from other platforms to provide nuance and a multitude of perspectives from within a very shattered fandom.

The platforms used are TikTok, Reddit, YouTube, fan-run blogs, legacy press and Tumblr.

1.5.5 Data accessibility

A copy of video material discussed in this essay is kept on a hard drive. Upon timely request delivery can be planned. The drive is not stored on cloud-services. The drive is for academic use only, and any outstanding request by non-certified press outside of the academic will be denied automatically.

[119] Williams. P.67

Data from the drive may not be republished, transferred, or shared. Should any sensitive personal information remain on the drive, that should have been deleted and that has been deleted from the original published source after which the digital copy was made – it may not be republished or re-distributed or shared. Please flag the author to have this removed.

1.5.6 Structure of Analysis

The analysis starts with a description of the fantasy genre, which is primarily made up of sources from literary criticism, then this theory is applied to the Witcher books, to further contextualize them. Polish sources about the Witcher franchise then are added, discussing its local intertextual relationships. Important paratexts are described, such as the political implications of the Witcher in Poland – and the political implications of the game-tradition that the Witcher DRPGs belong to. This will then illuminate Netflix marketing and establishing of their interpretation of the text, and set up the conflict that is then described in 2.2. The Daddening of video games vs the theme of abortion. At this point, the analysis moves online into netnography. All is then tied back together again in the conclusion.

1.6 Research overview

According to a lot of the sources that have been used in this essay, a lot of researchers perceived a change in the year 2020 with a shift in social media – which in turn influences culture and cultural studies. A lot of similar books were published in 2021.

Daniel Reardon & David Wrights articles (such as “Quest for the Happy Ending to Mass Effect 3: The Challenges of Cocreation with Consumers in a Post-Certeauian Age.”) and books on technical communication and DRPGs are unique in their specificity and were very helpful to this essay. This essay leans more into a tv-adaption, and not into the games, therefore the essay does not use the term: technical communication, that much. However, their field of study could complement the use and perspective on paratexts that this essay does employ. For someone who is close to the culture of DRPGs, their book contextualizes and analyses events that many academics tend to overlook or minimize. But their historical

account brings to light larger trends that people outside of the DRPG culture have difficulty comprehending, especially since it is a hard subject to find trustworthy information on.

Miles Booy's book "interpreting Star Wars"[120] is a study similar to this essay, but moving more through critics responses than citing fans and fan-critics directly. The book serves as a good example of how one can approach a study of a whole franchise, and not just the one movie or the one adaption. Booy accounts for interpretive strategies employed by different generations of fans throughout the years, and tied their responses to ongoing cultural events at the time, as well as describing the relationship between the creator of the franchise and its audience.[121]

Erika Engstrom and Ralph Beliveau book on "Gramsci and Media Literacy" further illuminates this field of reception studies that approaches media that utilises transmedia storytelling. They bring to light the massive challenge presented to the viewer, when trying to critically source and analyse the messages that are delivered to them, as cultural consumers. They focus on what the consequences of this might be for the audience of tv and movies, such as increasing polarization.[122] They provide a guide of Gramsci and his work through the years, which aids in essays like mine where hegemony is a very useful concept. It is also a concept that is easier to explain to many students of media, compared to other, somewhat similar systems of thoughts such as Bourdieu or the whole Representation theory of Stuart Hall. Because the aim of Engstrom and Beliveau leans more toward trying to fix the issues identified, their choice of using theory that could, theoretically, be more accessible, is smart and their detailed description of the theory is useful for the field.

A fan studies primer, by Rebecca Williams and Paul Booth, is an amazing handbook that gives structure and ethic to this specific part of reception studies. The book provides practical tips as well as theory to understand the social processes within the fandoms that we study. They also provide examples of fandom studies form minority groups, which otherwise tend to be underrepresented within the field. Because one is rather visible in this type of field, and

[120] Booy, Miles. Interpreting Star Wars, Reading a modern film franchise. New York: Bloomsbury academic, 2021.
[121] Booy, p.1-12
[122] Engstrom. P.3

susceptible to harassment because of one's field of study, it is very important that they illuminate what this means to the marginalized academic in this type of situation.

2. Analysis

2.1 What is fantasy?

Why do audiences have different opinions on what is a good adaption of *Fantasy?* First we must ask: what even is *Fantasy?*

2.1.1 Fuzzy sets

In 1992, Brian Attebery noted a "growing academic interest in a body of literature that deliberately violates the generic conventions of realism, conventions that not too long ago were generally used as defining criteria for great or serious fiction."[123] He then set out to theorize "what strategies of presentation and development allow them to achieve the fantastic."[124] But, this idea to theorize what is *fantastic* had been done before, and Attebery draws upon it when he approaches the subject:

Structuralist Tzvetan Todorov wrote about fantasy in *The Fantastic.* Using the uncanny, and similar language, to understand the genre. [125] Two years later we get Colin Manlove's *Modern Fantasy*, that doesn't try to completely define the genre, but states that it is a genre that tries to evoke wonder and that contains story elements of the supernatural.[126] Manlove notes in his introduction that Fantasy is a genre with "a very large readership, and already enjoys considerable academic repute, particularly in America."[127] This is noteworthy, since he doesn't frame it as a subculture.

[123] Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana university press, 1992. P.VII
[124] Attebery P.IX
[125] Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic, a structural approach to a literary genre.* Ithaca: Cornell university press, 1973. P.24f
[126] Manlove, Colin N. *Modern Fantasy, Five studies.* London: Cambridge university press, 1975. P.1
[127] Manlove, (1975) p.vii

William Robert Irwin publish The Game of the Impossible a short time after, a more comprehensive study of fantasy, focusing on the play between the author and the audience as one of its main functions.[128]

Darko Suvin publish his classic book on Science fiction, *Metamorphoses of science fiction,* which focus on the cognitive interpretive aspects of the genre involved when creating the perception of the fantastical, which can be applied to both Fantasy and science fiction.[129] Rosemary Jackson publish *Fantasy,* taking aim at the genres subversive aspects by utilizing psychoanalytical theory.[130]

Kathryn Hume states that fantasy is a subcategory of American literature, and it is not considered as valuable as gothic literature. Leaning on Auerbach and his dissemination of mimesis, (which reveal the "weakness of any claim to reality,"[131]) It is because of literatures traditional approach and focus on mimetic assumptions, that fantasy is kept pushed to the side.[132] (This argument is still one used often, with problematic (in regards to theoretic approaches to realism) phrasing such as "I only read novels about real things."

Returning to Attebery, he is, similar to other critics of fantastical literature,[133] concerned about the status of genre-fiction as a whole, something which occupies his thinking a lot. Citing Le Guin he reflects that genre fiction, that should be a neutral term, is applied to a higher degree on literature that lives outside of academic circles. Fantasy is an *othered* fiction, and it has served many writers and readers of *othered* groups, such as women who read or write.[134]

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[128] Irwin, William R. *The Game of the Impossible, A rhetoric of fantasy.*Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1976. P.11-32.
[129] Gerry, Canavan. "The Suvin event", in Suvin, Darko, *Metamorphoses of science fiction, on the poetics and history of a literary genre.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016. P.xi-xxxvi
[130] Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy, the literature of subversion.* London: Routledge, 1981.
[131] Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis, Responses to reality in western literature.* New York: Methuen, 1984. P.xii
[132] Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis, Responses to reality in western literature.* New York: Methuen, 1984. P.3
[133] Aldiss, Brian W. *Billion year spree: the history of science* fiction. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1973. P.3 Aldiss states that Mary Shelleys Frankenstein is the first Sci-Fi novel, by association, all SF is more "serious."
[134] Attebery is drawing upon Rosemary Jackson. She, in turn, builds on the conclusion of Todorov and argues that fantasy is obscured "as something shameful." Jackson uses Freud and some lacanian psychoanalysis to show how there is more to the Fantasy genre. - Jackson (1981). p.171-180.

Attebery suggests an understanding of fantasy as both formula and mode. That is, a *formula* with fantastical things in it, such as wizards, dragons, magical swords and witches– a consistent commercial product. And a playful self-reflexive *mode* that subverts the established order.[135]

A mode with two polarities: The limited, *mimesis*, and the unlimited: *fantasy*. "Mimesis and fantasy are not opposites. They can and do coexist within any given work; there are no purely mimetic or fantastic works of fiction."[136]

Moving on, Attebery writes "The critic looks the candidate over, consults his list of characteristics, and assigns the book to the Allied Zone of fantasy or the Soviet Zone of SF, ignoring its ties to cousins on the other side of the wall."[137] What Attebery instead suggest the critic can do, is looking at the candidate as a centre, rather than something defined by its bounds. The *Fuzzy set* theory choses an archetypical work of fantasy (Such as Tolkien's *Lord of the rings*) and by looking at the way that text relate to other similar texts, he maps out a centre that defines the genre.

"Tolkien's form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception."[138] Attebery then brings forward three specific ways in which other works of fantasy tend to resemble *Lord of the rings*. That is, their content (the impossible, a violation of natural law) [Suvin?], their structure (a comic structure[139] with a problem-resolution setup) and their reader-response (a reader-response that evokes wonder in the reader).[140]

Attebery argues that fantasy lends itself well to a postmodernist reading, no matter what year that fantasy book was produced.[141] "I propose to examine fantasy, first, as it appeared to readers with Modernist expectations, and then juxtaposed with examples of the Postmodern fantastic. The modernist literature he describe as disruptive of narrative sequence, with an ironic tendency "in every phase of storytelling. Writers turned an ironical

[135] Attebery p.1f
[136] Attebery p.3
[137] Attebery p.12
[138] Attebery P.14
[139] As opposed to a tragic one.
[140] Attebery p.15f
[141] Attebery p.37

eye on mores, then on character and motivation, on documentary realism, on the arrangement of incidents into a plot, on chronological narrative and finally on language itself. Each had fallen under suspicion as a means of discovering and conveying meaning."[142] He argues that this dominant literature stole the spotlight for other alternatives of other genius qualities, such as for instance, *Lord of the Rings*, which is without irony.[143] Literature that keeps "one foot always in the narrative past"[144] and one foot in a structuralist present, "one foot in fantasy, one in objective reality,"[145] become the new postmodern. A postmodern that will be different depending on where on draws the line of the modern to begin with.[146]

This idea of the postmodern fantasy isn't as famous as Attebery's idea of fuzzy sets. I bring it up because it becomes important to understand the journey of the franchise which I'm studying in this essay, which is a work that in a lot of ways carry the hallmark of a modernist fiction with unreliable narrators, irony and moral "entropy." But that also embody the postmodern features of Tolkien, such as a reliance on metafiction[147] – a feature that grows with the franchise as it migrates into other media. It contains stories within stories, like the *lord of the rings*, as well as metaphors, and fable.

2.1.2 Language of the fantastic

Farah Mendlesohn is another literary scholar that theorized the genre of fantasy, building on the idea of *Fuzzy sets* that Attebery introduced. Whatever other theories existed before him, *Fuzzy Sets* has reached a consensus among scholars, and in comparison, most other theories have faded.[148] She writes "I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief. [---] Intrinsic to my argument is that a fantasy succeeds when the library techniques employed are most

[142] Attebery p.39
[143] Attebery p.38
[144] Attebery p.40
[145] Attebery P.40
[146] Attebery p.36
[147] Attebery p.41
[148] Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of fantasy*. Middletown: Wesleyan university press, 2008. P.xiii

appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy. Understanding the broad brushstrokes of plot or the decoration of device is less fundamental to comprehending the genre; all of these may be tweaked or subverted while still remaining firmly within the reader's expectation of the text."[149]

Mendlesohn suggests a division of the genre into four subcategories. Portal-quest fantasy, [150] which follows a protagonist that leaves their familiar world behind through a portal and finds a new world. The audience follows the protagonist, exploring and decoding the new world through them.

The forth book in Sapkowski's series, *The tower of the swallow,* culminates with Ciri – The Witcher Geralt's adopted daughter and one of the main characters of the series, fleeing her enemies by riding her horse into a portal (Or, a tower in this case,) that brings her into another world.[151] When the story follows Ciri, we discover the world with her, much like what Mendlesohn describes. Ciri is also a character with a quest, or rather, a destiny or fate, that keeps haunting her and, before this dramatic end, the whole book is framed by Ciri retelling her story to another character.

Mendlesohn also introduce the subcategory of Immersive fantasy, which describes a more mimetic style of fantasy.[152] Yet again this style fits The Witcher perfectly, in that it is a narrative with a limited third person perspective, or sometimes even just a dialogue, where the characters don't know what's going on and we, the reader, are put down into this world together with the characters which we are following closely.

Where should we place The Witcher franchise? Both Mendlesohn and Attebery bring us up to date with the field of fantasy literature in *The Cambridge companion to Fantasy*.[153] In their chronology of fantasy literature[154], dating from Beowulf to Nnedi Okorafor's *Who fears death*, Sapkowski is still nowhere to be seen. Their idea of fantasy is mainly made up of English or American literature, with a few translated examples (such as *Wizard of the Crow*,

[149] Mendlesohn P.xiii
[150] Mendlesohn p.1
[151] Sapkowski, *The tower of the swallow*. P.429-458.
[152] Mendlesohn (2008) p.59-113.
[153] James, Edward (Ed.). Mendlesohn, Farah(Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2012.
[154] Edward (ed.) p.XV-XXIV

by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.) But Why is this? Sapkowski was known to the English fantasy world, since he got (that award?) In 2009.

As previously mentioned, Sapkowski believes the game adaption has in some way hurt the authority of his books. His books seem adjacent to the games, instead of works of original fiction from which the games and other adaptions has sprung. His style is perhaps also provocative to the senses of an academic world trying to reclaim some dignity for the Fantasy genre. His books are filled with lustful gazes and stoic men, that on the surface look like too much of a parody. However, here is where we return to that issue of the postmodern fantasy. The self-reflexive and satirical nature of it.

2.1.3 What is The Witcher, a Polish fantasy?

The new order was not being built *on* the ruins of state socialism, but *with* those ruins.[155]

Sapkowski submitted a short story to a competition in the polish magazine Fantastyka.[156] This short story, *Wiedźmin,* (witcher or hexer,) came in third place and was eventually published in said magazine in December 1986.[157] [158]

By the 1980s, in the much more established British/American fantasy, the *sword-and-sorcery* type of fantasy of the 1970's had fallen out of favour, and instead *Quest fantasy* dominated fantasy publishing.[159] The main difference is that the latter tend to contain a prophesy or references to fairytales that inform the characters of a destiny, a fate which

[155].Pobłocki, Kacper. "the economics of nostalgia, socialist films and capitalist commodities in contemporary Poland", in Sarkisova, Oksana (ed.), Apor, Péter (ed.) *Past for the eyes, East European representations of communism in cinema and museums after 1989.* Budapest: Central European university press, 2008. P.181-214. Here in this specific quote, Kacper is paraphrasing László Bruszt et al. From their book *Post-socialist Pathways*. In their chapter "Path dependence and privatization strategies" (p.80-105), they describe the collapse of the old order, and the introduction of capitalism (and specifically, Polish privatization efforts in the late 1980s).

[156] Cluth and Grants online encyclopedia. https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fantastyka, (this entry: sep 2018). (Accessed 2023-05-09). Fantastyka in polish, fantastika in english, a term described by Cluth and that combines science fiction and fantasy into one genre. This online encyclopedia is well known among fantasy scholars, it is cited in *The Cambridge companion to Fantasy literature,* among others.

[157] Gawroń, Sławomir. Bajorek, Kinga. *A Real Witcher – Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series? In the Circle of Multimedia Adaptations of a Fantasy Series of Novels 'The Witcher' by A. Sapkowski*. P.3

[158] Appendix A: scan of Fantastyka December 1986, Cover, p.18-20 and p.46-47. Obtained from anonymous fan upload on Tumblr. https://stillunusual.tumblr.com/post/190064951061/fantastyka

[159] Mendlesohn, Farah. James, Edward. *A short history of Fantasy*. London: Middlesex university press, 2009. P.118

awaits them. The *Quest fantasy* then ends as destiny is realized, while the *Sword-and-sorcery* could always continue with another shorter adventure. The *sword-and-sorcery* style of fantasy is made up of interlinked short stories, while the *quest fantasy* is usually made up of a story arc, novels, trilogies. The *medievalist fantasies* had also gained in popularity, by authors such as Robert Jordan, Terry Goodkind and George R. R. Martin.[160] In the 80s, Fantasy as a genre had started to establish itself in the cinema as well, with productions such as Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal,*[161]and *Labyrinth.*[162][163]

The Witcher Saga had a similar journey, even if it was a little bit behind the British-American literature in terms of literary trends. The story published in Fantastyka was none the less very successful. It caught the attention of the magazine's readers who then continued to support the author as he kept writing short stories set in The Witcher world; most of them featuring the white-haired mutant monster-hunter: Geralt of Rivia. These early stories were later published in collections, the first: *Wiedźmin* (The Witcher) being released in 1990. It was never translated in that form into English. Rather, those stories plus a few new ones were collected in (*Ostatnie życzenie*) "The last wish,"[164] and (*Miecz przeznaczenia*) "Sword of destiny."[165] The short format allowed Sapkowski to play with narrative structure and fantasy tropes, in this sense the short stories themselves move beyond the traditional *sword-and-sorcery* genre.

The texts are always anachronistic, dialog-heavy and with several main characters that do not age. Some characters can jump through time and space, making the story harder to follow as the story progresses, especially as many framing devices are set in a distant future, looking back on what they think might have happened. The narrators are therefore often

[160] Mendlesohn, et al. P.144f
[161] Henson, Jim. Oz, Frank. *The Dark Crystal*. 1982.
[162] Henson, Jim. *Labyrinth*. 1986.
[163] Mendlesohn et al. P.119f
[164] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Last Wish*. (Translated by Danusia Stok in 2007). London: Gollancz, 2019 (Polish original 1993). This book contains the short stories: *The voice of reason I-VII* (spliced chapter-wise between the other short stories)*, The Witcher, A grain of truth, The lesser evil, A question of price, The edge of the world, The Last Wish*.
[165] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Sword of destiny*. (Translated by David French in 2015). London: Gollancz, 2015 (Polish original 1993). This book contains the short stories: *The Bounds of Reason, A shard of Ice, Eternal Flame, A Little Sacrifice, The Sword of Destiny, Something More.*

unreliable, as they often misinterpret things, or their interpretations are built on legend rather than history. The story therefor contains many palimpsestic elements and, because of this, Salkowski's writing style has been the subject of criticism. The texts citational hybridity,[166] not only of itself but also of the fairytales, mythos and legends it borrows from, could put it into a postmodern mode of fantasy, which prompted some critics to react with "suspicion if not sarcastic contempt."[167] Sapkowski was suspected of aiming way to high with what they viewed as too artsy an ambition, whilst at the same time, the critics argued, speaking to such an unsophisticated group of readers. [168] However, this constant recycling of fairytales, legends, history and literary classics has been described as a feature of the fantasy genre as a whole. Brian Attebery calls this the Fantasy Genre's *Cultural work¸* which brings the reader of fantasy closer to other texts that would otherwise be out of reach for them.[169]

Sapkowski's style remained as the author moved on from short stories into writing novels, all featuring Geralt as the-, or one of-, the main characters. A series of five new novels were published in the 90s: (Krew elfów) "Blood of Elves,"[170] (Czas pogardy) "Time of Contempt,"[171] (Chrzest ognia) "Baptism of Fire,"[172] (Wieża Jaskółki) "The Tower of the Swallow,"[173] and (Pani Jeziora) "The Lady of the Lake."[174] They have one overarching story, matching the *quest fantasy* trend of the 80's. This larger story features another main character, the young girl *Ciri*, that Geralt adopts. Ciri's perspective is prevalent in the

[166] Butler, Christoper. *Postmodernism: a very short introduction.* Oxford: Oxford university press, 2002. Kindle edition. P.89
[167] Deszcz-Tryhubczak, Justyna. Zarzycka, Agata. The chapter: "On Alien Alders: The 'Erl-King' Inspirations in Andrzej Sapkowski's Witcher Saga" from *Collision of realities: Establishing research on the fantastic in Europe*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012. P.188
[168] Deszcz-Tryhubczak (2012) P.188
[169] Deszcz-Tryhubczak et al.p.188f Makes this statement on the witcher, citing Brian Atteberys *Strategies of Fantasy*.
[170] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Blood of elves.* (Translated by Danusia Stok in 2008). New York: Orbit, 2009 (Polish original *Krew Elfów* 1994). (English translation was first published by Gollancz in the UK, 2008).
[171] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Time of contempt.* (Translated by David French in 2013). London: Gollancz, (This edition, 2014). (Polish original *Czas pogardy* in 1995).
[172] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Baptism of fire*. (Translated by David French in 2014). London: Gollancz, (This edition, 2015). (Polish original *Chrzest Ognia* in 1996).
[173] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The tower of the swallow.* (Translated by David French in 2016). London: Gollancz, 2016. (Polish original Wieża Jaskółki, 1997).
[174] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The lady of the lake*. (Translated by David French 2017). London: Gollancz, 2017 (This edition, 2020). (Polish original *Pani Jeziora* 1999).

overarching story and brings a coming-of-age element to the franchise as we get to watch her grow up.

In the 1990's there was a growing interest for Japanese fantasy among English-speaking audiences, especially with the success of Hayao Miyazaki's anime: *Princess Mononoke* in 1997.[175] As well as the emergence of *Dark Fantasy*, which usually has a setting in the 19th or 20th century, with fantastic elements such as vampires or werewolves.[176] Both the witcher franchise and the books specifically are influenced by this. The witcher himself, seem much like a samurai, which will show itself more clearly in *The hexer* (2001) and the TV show from the year after, where Sapkowski still held influence in this depiction since he partook in the scriptwriting. Sapkowski also include Japanese legends (the Kitsune) into his last novel about the witcher: (*Sezon burz) Season of storms*.[177]

The journey into a bigger multi-media adaptation started in the early 90's with comic-books (which did not do well[178]) and a movie adaption which production struggled, but a different movie was eventually released in 2001[179], along with a tv series in 2002.[180][181][182] The movie was haunted by problems and flopped.[183] The fervent polish fandom that had inspired the author to continue writing was still present, and early on they had strong reservations toward any adaption attempts of the franchise, especially as the books got translated into English. The reaction from the fans might seem disproportionate, but, by this point the work and especially the identity of the witcher Geralt, had, among these fans, become closely tied to the idea of Polish nationality, and polish cultural heritage as a whole.

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[175] Mendlesohn, et al. P.150
[176] Mendlesohn, et al. P.152f
[177] Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Season of storms*. (Translated by David French). London: Gollancz, (This edition,2018). (Polish original: *Seson burz* in 2013).
[178] Gawroński, et al. p.3f Comic books illustrated by Bogusław Polch but with a script written by Sapkowski.
[179] *Wiedzmin, (The Hexer)*. Brodzki, Marek. 2001. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0300657/ the movie can be viewed on Polish Netflix.
[180] *Wiedzmin*, TV mini Series, 2002. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1070742/
[181] A fan upload with English subtitles (by unknown) can be found in this internet archive: https://archive.org/details/TheWitcherTV/01.avi
[182] A polish stream for the TV show. https://vod.tvp.pl/seriale,18/wiedzmin-odcinki,308469
[183] Gawroński, et al. p.4

Polish media scholar, Sławomir Gawroń, writes: “During the filming, the team faced opposition from fans of Andrzej Sapkowski’s work, who founded the ‘Committee for Defence of the Only Right Image of the Witcher’. A protest against the mainroles [sic] cast and departing from the spirit of the original in the plot was announced on their website. For obvious reasons, the 13 episode series also did not appeal to the audience.“[184]
It needs to be said that literary critics in Poland (disregarding those that was mentioned previously that thought him suspiciously pretentious) cherished Salkowski’s work, as he was the first Polish author to truly succeed in writing fantasy that was not just a translation of western traditions. But instead relied on a mix of western and Slavic literature with playful intertextual references to local mythology, legends, and other literary motifs.[185] But this play is also partly the reason why fans got so invested in adaption, especially when it comes to Geralt’s “alleged Slavic character”, Gawronski writes:

> “There is an ongoing dispute among the faithful admirers of Sapkowski’s work about the Slavic origins of the protagonist, Geralt of Rivia. This dispute has been going on for twenty years, but its apogee has recently been observed, since “The Witcher” ceased to be an exclusively Polish (Slavic) cultural product and entered the mainstream global mass culture. This is possible not only because of the translations of Sapkowski’s books into other languages, but due to multimedia adaptations of “The Witcher”.”[186]

A few years later the books would be picked up by CDPR and with that, its ties to the image of Poland as a highly technological nation grew all the more influential.

> The spirit of neo-liberal anti-politics virtually dominated the Polish popular culture of the 1990s. Its emblematic literary figure – Geralt the Witcher from Andrzej Sapkowski’s fantasy sagas – was a “professional” whose greatest desire was to eschew the petty political quarrels of his contemporaries and simply “do a good job.” As many critics have noticed, he closely resembled Franz Maurer, the cynical former secret police officer in Władysław Pasikowski’s *dogs* (Psy, 1992), who was “beyond

[184] Gawroński, et al. p.4
[185] Deszcz-Tryhubczak et al. P.187
[186] Gawroński, et al. 3P.

> the good and evil" of contemporary Polish politics and eliminated "baddies" irrespective of their political affiliation [---] The characters of socialist cinema brought back to grace in the 1990s were marked by their a-political attitude.[187]

In the introduction it was mentioned that many identify The Witcher books as part of the grimdark subgenre of fantasy. The expression comes from the tabletop figurine game-franchise Warhammer 40000. This definition of Fantasy remains contested in a lot of fantasy genre discourse. Other titles within this subgenre would be "The blade itself" by Joe Abercrombie or the more recent "The poppy war" by Rebecca Kuang. Grimdark could also be considered a marketing genre, [188] such as YA/Young Adult – which is more about marketing toward an identifiable audience and not necessarily about attributes within the text itself.

To summarise it, The Witcher books shares an intertextual relationship with other polish fiction that influence its dark, anti-political style. However, it is also a series of books that clearly play with the conventions of the fantasy genre by using self-reflexive narrative strategies where it encourages the reader to draw their own conclusion, often to comedic effect. This pulls it more toward a postmodern subgenre of Fantasy. However, when sold to markets it is enshrouded into the clothes of the grimdark franchise, because this is easier to understand. The English-speaking reader will, however, be surprised by what they find in the book, and most if not all exclusively polish references in the book will be lost to the reader as they are simply too hard to understand if one isn't well-versed in polish history.

Within Poland, The Witcher was both a symbol of the anti-political attitude as described by Sarkisova, but also a symbol of Polish liberal and technological prowess. This is shown, for instance, when then Prime minister, Donald Tusk, gave a copy of Witcher 2, and the English translation of the books to President Barak Obama, member of the Democratic party. It had been signed by the author and the development team behind CDPR.[189]

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[187] Sarkisova, Oksana. Apor, Peter (editor). *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums After 1989.* Budapest (New York): Central European University Press, 2008. P198f

[188] Reiterating my point above about marketing genres, this is a link to a local chain of fantasy/science fiction bookstores (Science-fiction bokhandeln). They sort Sapkowski's Witcher franchise under grimdark for sales purposes. https://www.sfbok.se/tag/grimdark (accessed 2023-08-01)

[189] The Witcher 2 presented to President Barack Obama, 2011-05-30, thewitcher.com | The Witcher 2 Presented to President Barack Obama [Accessed: 2023-08-10]

2.2 The Daddening of video games vs. The theme of abortion.

Another trend in fantasy and sci-fi were erupting when CDPR released their most successful Witcher game, The Witcher 3 – that of daddening.[190] These are games that put fatherhood front and centre of the story and as part of gameplay. One very successful franchise to do this was The last of us, by the studio Naughty Dog. It has now been adapted into an equally successful show on HBO. YouTube channel Just Write, tackles the daddening of The Witcher 3, and what type of father figure Geralt is.[191]

These tropes are unique to the DRPG's. Of course, Geralt is a father to Ciri in the books as well, but, in the books Geralt, Yennefer and Ciri are a shattered family. Geralt spends most of his time in the books looking for Ciri. There are few scenes in which he actually gets to raise her or guide her as a father. In the books, Ciri is a girl that is forced to grow up on her own. And, the further along the novels progress the closer they move into what Mendlesohn described as "portal fantasy." In this sense, it is not only the main character that changes, but the genre itself shifts and wavers. Like previously stated, Sapkowski plays with genre conventions throughout his Witcher books.

The Ciri that Geralt gets to raise in Witcher 3 is an adult, since the games are intended to be a continuation of the stories from the books. However, as Just Write states in his video, the Witcher 3 creates opportunities for the player to empathize with Ciri, an adult woman, but that is also a daughter. And, as Just Write also states, discussions on gender in games are very sensitive to a lot of gamers.[192] Therefor this moment of empathy is, in a way, antihegemonic. The moments are not just about roleplay and drama – if Geralt doesn't support Ciri in the right way, Ciri won't feel as confident in her abilities and will fail to save the world, she dies and the world will die with her. The game will then end that way. The

[190] Totilo, Stephen. "The daddening of Video games" in Kotaku, 2010-02-09 https://kotaku.com/the-daddening-of-video-games-5467695 [accessed 2023-07-02]
[191] Just Write, The Witcher 3, The Last of Us, and the 'Daddening' of Video Games. [YouTube video] https://youtu.be/5pG7Wc5TUTA?t=589 [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[192] Just Write, "the Witcher 3, The Last of Us, and the 'daddening' of video games" 17:50

more satisfying endings, with the world being saved, with Ciri being saved, require that Geralt show empathy, interest and support.

Furthermore, the characterization of Geralt as both extremely powerful, but also just a guy, an underdog regardless of his power that gets harassed for being a mutant by society around him, is also part of Sapkowski's characterization of him. As mentioned before there are possible inspirations for Sapkowski into making this anti-political character with no real power to change anything. In Sapkowski's books, in the end, Geralt dies by being stabbed with a pitchfork by a scared farmer, whom Geralt had been too kind not to kill first.

The Geralt of The Witcher 3 is portrayed the same way, like an amalgam of hegemonic, stereotypical masculinity, and an othered, powerless (in society, not on the battlefield) man that doesn't seek out unnecessary conflict and that just wants to resolve the problem. But, regardless of this attitude, is constantly pulled into problems because of his wish to resolve whatever new issue that has arisen. And so the wheel turns and his conflict cannot ever be resolved.[193]

Another tv series that drew on this trend of dads and fatherhood is The Mandalorian on Disney+. It features an overpowered warrior that now has to take care of a child. It was also a massive success.

It doesn't seem strange then, that audiences might expect this theme in Netflix adaption: The Witcher. However, this is a theme brought to the franchise with the DRPG. The books also featured a Geralt that showed empathy with Ciri, but that Geralt showed empathy and understanding to many female characters, not just her. But, the DRPG's that CDPR made does not feature this to the same degree. For instance, Geralt is very explicitly pro-choice in the books (and he is not the only male character that is.) This is a discussion he returns to many times in most of the books. (The books also feature many crimes against women's reproductive rights – which is framed as bad. In fact, most of the worst villains commit this crime against women in the books in some way, there is an obsession with women and their reproduction among the evil characters in the books.)

[193] Just Write, "the Witcher 3, The Last of Us, and the 'daddening' of video games" 10:10

It is not strange that Sapkowski would bring this up, since Poland has currently banned abortion and the discourse has been ongoing for a long time. But this is a theme into which CDPR, for whatever reason, didn't want to approach too much. Whenever a woman has an abortion in The Witcher 3, there are severe consequences for her. Such as, when the Bloody barons abused wife asks witches for an abortion, and the buried foetus is turned into a monster and she is made mad by the evil witches and are forced to become their slave.

The fact that the books contain some political debates that the Netflix show, nor the games, dare bring up has not gone unnoticed by some fans.[194] In the books Geralt describe his own mother's choice to have or not have him as "A choice which should be respected, for it is the holy and irrefutable right of every woman." Geralt's mother chose to not abort him then gave him up for adoption because she couldn't take care of him. The sorceresses in the books often help women get abortions or help them with other reproductive care – and for this they are often punished or shunned by those in power (unless when the powerful need their services). The use of words here, of the choice as being holy, of it being an irrefutable right – twists the words often used by the anti-abortion movement, which would say that abortions are un-holy. Unholy like the monsters that abortion brought in The Witcher 3.

On Tumblr, the witcher fanfic writer and fan, fangirleaconmigo, collects some of the many instances in which abortion is brought up in the witcher books.[195] Fangirleaconmigo returns to her blog on Tumblr later, describing that she got pushback for her citations and that conservative fans fought to make the claim that Geralt didn't support women's right to choose.[196]

The different texts in the franchise are all interested in social justice and in pushing the hegemonic powers that be – but they do so for different issues and in different ways. The

[194] r/Gamingcirclejerk UM, so Geralt is pro-choice now? / In this reddit thread, the fans are sarcastically discussing how the Netflix tv show is blamed for being too filled with SJW propaganda, as if the books wasn't concerned with women's rights. https://www.reddit.com/r/Gamingcirclejerk/comments/cpmec9/um_so_geralt_is_prochoice_now_damn_netflix/

[195] Tumblr @fangirleaconmigo, "abortion in The Witcher Books" 2023-01-04 [ACCESSED 2023-08-14] https://fangirleaconmigo.tumblr.com/post/705548077873922048/ok-ill-start-with-the-fact-that-sorceresses

[196] Tumblr @fangirleaconmigo, "religion and spirituality in the Witcher books: What DOES Geralt of Rivia Believe in? 2023-01-15 https://fangirleaconmigo.tumblr.com/post/706554218251747328/maybe-weird-and-mybe-vague-but-if-you-ever-have?is_related_post=1 [Accessed 2023-08-14]

Games focus more on the male perspective on things, women's issues yes, but through the lens of fatherhood. The books do not share that same filter.

If the DRPGs were the text that first brought most fans to the franchise, it is not too strange if many feel like both the books and the tv show are too concerned about the perspective of women. Because compared to the games, they are. With Netflix American adaption, that political battle might have become simply too hot for some audiences, who had an easier time with the books since they are exotic and polish and its politics are not as close to the reader as the local adaption's politics would be. The fan might want to return to Geralt, and only Geralt, that character that was supposedly so anti-political (though not in the way that they might think. He is initially written as anti-political in the post-soviet, polish-political-crisis type of way.)

2.3 Henry Cavill - The nerd chevalier.

From the beginning, the story in media has been that Henry Cavill stubbornly petitioned to be cast as Geralt. From the beginning, Henry Cavill said that he was a gamer, and that he was very passionate about The Witcher games made by CDPR. When it was announced that Lauren Hissrich would be showrunner to an adaption of, not the DRPGs, but the books, Cavill pestered his agents to make sure he would get the role. [197]

Cavill put in the hours practicing with the sword, exercising so hard that his muscles broke his costumes on set – media reports.[198] In fact, a lot of Cavill's marketing is about fitness.[199]

[197] Lee, Chris. "How did Henry Cavill claim to get cast in Netflix's the witcher? He was 'really annoying.' In Vulture. 2019-07-19 [Accessed 2023-08-14] https://www.vulture.com/2019/07/henry-cavill-in-the-witcher-the-story-behind-the-casting.html

[198] Dicarlo, Steven. "Henry Cavil [sic] got so jacked for the witcher that he ripped his costumes… thanks to his workout routine." In *TheThings* 2020-01-26 https://www.thethings.com/henry-cavil-got-so-jacked-for-the-witcher-that-he-ripped-his-costumes-thanks-to-his-workout-routine/ [Accessed 2023-08-14]

[199] Men's Health, "Henry Cavill Explains His 'Witcher' Arm and Leg Workout, Train Like a Celebrity, Men's Health. 2019-11-19 https://youtu.be/tSzlgybdkFA [Accessed 2023-08-10]

He is a gamer, he works out (in clever ways) and he does not use steroids[200] and he does his own stunts himself.[201]

The Witcher season 1 did well on Netflix, and viewers discussing it online were enthusiastic about it. However, some narratives about the show started here, and remains even today. This reddit thread by r/witcher collects some of these earlier reactions.[202]

> As a fan of The Witcher's books and games as well as fantasy stories in general, I'm glad that the show was such a huge success, but this unfortunately greenlights Lauren Hissrich as the permanent showrunner.
>
> She was also a head writer for awful shows like The Defenders and Jessica Jones, and sometimes we can see such flaws in this show (everything wrong with episode 6, a lot of poorly developed characters, use of modern words in dialogues, an* awfully written Yennefer, and a long etc.)
>
> Don't get me wrong! I want the show to be successful, but I also wish for the quality to improve.[203]

This comment is then contested by other fans, stating that they loved Hissrich's other shows and that: (in the response to 'use of modern words in dialogues')

> Then you are not a fan of the books or the games. The books have anachronistic dialog. The games do because the books do. The show does because the books do.
>
> Every time someone leads with 'I'm a fan of the books...' they follow it was some retarded nonsense which clearly demonstrates that they didn't read or understand the books. [204]

Other fans take care to state that Hissrich have been accessible to fans, and responding to feedback.

> Yeah, defenders was terrible. Jessica Jones was good in season 1...idk if she [Hissrich] had anything to do with that or no. But honestly give her a chance, she did something D&D would never do now, she did a AMA and addressed most of the concerns and issues and took a lot of criticism on the chin in a fantastic way. And I really love the show, I didn't think I would, I wanted to like it but I ended up loving it.

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[200] Greg Doucette, "Henry Cavill – Was he NATURAL for his roles as Superman OR in the Netflix Drama The Witcher." 2020-01-11 [Accessed 2023-08-10] https://youtu.be/bJvRpDx5ELM
[201] Recap Junnkie, "Why henrt Cavill did his OWN stunts for the witcher.." 2023-07-23 https://youtu.be/DR8DWL-J0CA [Access 2023-08-10]
[202] r/witcher 'The Witcher' Breaks Netflix Series Viewership Records, 2019. [Reddit thread] 'The Witcher' Breaks Netflix Series Viewership Records : r/witcher (reddit.com)
[203] By Joelesidin, in r/witcher
[204] By r/gilbes

> Is it perfect? No. But she has showed me enough and knows enough to carry the show. I think she will learn and grow and that's all we can ask or her[205]

The notion that the show itself is bad, but the actors are great despite that is precent even this early on.

> I'm with you dude. The show is fun but poorly done. Why do people need to lie to themselves.
>
> The actors hit it out of the park in SPITE of the plot and script. And the battle scenes were god damn embarrassing.[206]

The show lives very much in the shadows of Game of thrones, as expressed by another user (who deleted their account, therefor their username is not visible).

> Why is this garbage of a show so popular? Script is damn mess, timejumping is confusing, production value ranges from very high to school play level of quality, acting is very much subpar.
>
> People get angry when Witcher gets compared to GoT. I think the comparison is fair when it comes production value. Look at GoT Season 1, amazing costumes, beautiful sets, very good acting and a very strong script. And it cost less money to make. Of course that the budget got bigger with each new season but I am talking about the 1st season, the starting point of series.
>
> Netflix better shape the f up for season 2, because despite high watch number, many people saw through their BS and had mnay issues with the Witcher.

Another user responds:

> Garbage is increasingly popular !
> It does seem to lack a lot that made GoT so good (final season excepted). The main problem is that something about the way it's written is just off ....and it doesn't help that it looks and feels like low budget TV or straight-to -DVD pulp fantasy films a lot of the time.
> Pulp Fantasy is what genre I'd put this in, yes!
>
> I wish they would have used actors that were closer to the female characters in The Witcher 3 game. I really don't care at all for any of the characters in the series. I gave up after a few episodes but will try again next season...[207]

The comparison to Game of Thrones puts the writers and showrunners front and center, as the last season of that extremely successful show had been released six months before The

[205] r/TheWhiteWolf1080
[206] r/FruitJuicante
[207] r/Intended_To_Not_work

Witcher season 1.[208] Hissrich tried to downplay that comparison. In an interview with Polygon at the Witcher set in Budapest, Hissrich wanted to focus on the stories and not the size of the hype.[209] In this interview, in a magazine geared toward Gamers it is made clear that:

"Sapkowski came on board as an active creative consultant, and Cavill, as he would gush on set, is a die-hard fan of the series. […] For a fandom that knows the video game adaptation better than the source material, and a zeitgeist still reeling from the finale of Game of Thrones, a question looms large: Can The Witcher, which premieres on Netflix on Dec. 20, march into battle and survive the streaming wars?"

Hissrich, in this article, also address some of her motivations behind wanting to adapt the books, and, addressing some changes that she made in regard to one of the female leads of the show, that of Yennefer:

> Even before Bagiński hired her to adapt the books, Hissrich was entranced by Sapkowski's writing, and she strived to deliver a faithful adaptation. That meant understanding not only the source material, but the author's imagination.
>
> "I wanted to know why, as a Polish man, he wrote this story and what it was about his past," Hissrich told Polygon a few months after the show wrapped. "So we talked a lot about ice fishing. We drank some — OK, maybe *more* than a little — vodka. We just got to know each other. I pitched him my vision of the show and how I imagined the adaptation unfolding."
>
> There were obvious changes to make. A character like Yennefer, the sorceress whom Geralt falls hard for in the books, needed more dimension. Stray characters from the short stories were aged up to poke Geralt in conversation and draw his thoughts out of an internal monologue.
>
> Through every change, and even on set, Hissrich asked Sapkowski for his thoughts. He told the showrunner he didn't want to see the grocery list or what's in the cart, but instead just wanted to "taste the soup" when the show was complete.

[208] The last episode, "The Iron Throne" being released 2019-05-19. The first episode of The witcher "The End's Beginning" was released on 2019-12-20

[209] Maher, Cian. "Season of The Witcher" in Polygon 2019-12-20 https://www.polygon.com/2019/12/12/20995768/the-witcher-netflix-season-1-geralt-costume-swords-monsters-set [Accessed 2023-08-15]

Hissrich is the one in contact with the author, they do interviews together, these interviews are then published on Netflix secondary platforms, such as on their YouTube channels.[210]

Hissrich is also accessible at her Instagram, where fans leave comments and she responds. In it, she repeats, for instance, how the Netflix show is an adaption of the books not the Games.[211] She is not interpreted as genuine, she is not interpreted as a fan. She is interpreted as performative and lying.

After the airing of The Witcher season 1, Henry Cavill publishes a video to Instagram with himself building his own PC.[212] By doing this act, gamers all over the world identify with him.

Cavill also makes interviews in 2019, when he downplays any toxic elements of fandom, and defends fandoms right to dislike media.[213] This is in response to events around Justice League, and specifically Zack Snyder's Justice League—The Snyder cut. As he is interviewed, with The Witcher logo in the background, he brings this narrative into The Witcher, stating how he could never be exactly the character that people imagine in their own head. And if fans are angry about that he considers it passionate, not toxic. He then makes a parallel between the witcher, and how Geralt is hurt by colonialism and sexism. Geralt, who Cavill plays.

The story that is being perceived is that Henry Cavill, like Superman, or Geralt, is just a guy that wants to do the right thing. But he faces difficulties so that doesn't always work out. He is targeted by xenophobia. And Cavill paves the ground for fans here, warning that he might not be able to be exactly the Witcher they want.

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[210] Netflix: Behind the streams, Writing the Witcher with Adrzej Sapkowski and Lauren Hissrich. 2019-12-13 https://youtu.be/XLZgpMtB6mU [Accessed 2023-07-01]

[211] @laurenhissrich, Instagram. "We premiered #thewitcherbloodorigin trailer to a sold-out crowd at Brazil Comic-con, and the response was electric. 2022-12-03 https://www.instagram.com/p/Clt5HSjDmpu/ [accessed 2023-08-14]

[212] @HenryCavill "This kind of material isn't for everyone… viewer discretion is adviced." 2020-06-16 [Accessed 2023-06-16] https://www.instagram.com/p/CCs-N1Eh2Z5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==

[213] Jake's Takes "The Witcher Interview: Henry Cavill Talks Snyder Cut, Superman Sequels, Toxic Fandom." 2019-12-03 https://youtu.be/UayIJn-GWVg [Accessed 2023-08-14]

This resonates very well with fans that do not like being called toxic. They feel like they get called toxic if they have any type of negative feedback about a show at all.[214][215]

In November, one month prior to the release of season 2 of The Witcher. Henry Cavill is interviewed by The Hollywood reporter:

> The actor remains committed to supporting Hissrich's vision to keep The Witcher going for at least seven seasons. "Absolutely," Cavill says. "As long as we can keep telling great stories which honor [author Andrzej] Sapkowski's work."[216]

This statement, or reservation: "as long as we can keep telling great stories which honor Sapkowski's work" - frames Cavill, Not Hissrich, as the one closest to Sapkowski and Sapkowski's vision. And Henry, who markets himself as a gamer, will only remain in the show if Sapkowski's vision is honoured. It also denotes a tension between Cavill and Hissrich.

Henry does this again just a month later, in his interview with BBC Radio 1. There he states that "I will fight tooth and nail FOR him, to do him justice."[217] This might seem harmless, but with him previously pointing out that he requires the show to keep telling stories that honour Sapkowski's work, this makes it seem like it is the storytelling or larger production that he will be fighting with.

In this interview, Cavill also brings up his new project, another grimdark franchise very familiar to a lot of DRPG fans: an adaptation of Warhammer 40000. But not as an actor, he will be producing it. He is, in his storytelling to the market, a fan producing fantasy fandoms precious texts.

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[214] The star wars girl, "Henry Cavill defends fans when questioned about toxic fandom" 2019-12-06 https://youtu.be/LCGooSPVC6A [Accessed 2023-08-14]

[215] Clownfish TV "Henry Cavill DEFENDS Witcher Fans: Passionate, NOT Toxic!" 2019-12-06 https://youtu.be/BhNz7lSEQCU [Accessed 2023-08-14]

[216] Hibberd, James. "Why Henry Cavill Basically Already Is James Bond" in *The Hollywood Reporter.* 2021-11-10 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/feature/henry-cavill-interview-witcher-superman-1235044553/ [Accessed 2023-07-13]

[217] BBC Radio 1, "'Don't throw anything at me!' The Witcher's Henry Cavill on coin tossing, Warhammer and Highlander." 2021-12-17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN6EIt9cq4w [Accessed 2023-08-14]

Fan critics take note of this, and once it was announced that Cavill will be leaving the Witcher, this narrative is brought up a lot.[218]

In the long run, these narratives got convoluted. The story about Hissrich being annoyed, though ironic and joking in the article, at Cavill for haunting her so much to get the role of Geralt – turned into a narrative of her being annoyed at him for being a fan[219] that haunted her about the adaption – the adaption that he said he would only do if it remained close to Sapkowski's vison. But also, he is a fan, a fan that plays roles who are hurt by hegemonic powers such as racism and sexism. (Never do Cavill say that it is women that are hurt by sexism, and that it is people of colour that usually are hurt by racism.)

2.3.1 Creation is the domain of the fan. We do not mix with others!

In October, 2022, an interview with Beau DeMayo is published in The Direct. Beau DeMayo is a writer that used to work on The Witcher. In this interview, he states that in his new project (X-Men '97), only fan-writers are allowed to work on the project.

DeMayo revealed that he started the development process for X-Men '97 in Fall 2020, and once he was hired as the head writer, he made sure to fill the writers' room only with fans of the material. He made it clear that his team had to "respect the work" before they could be "allowed to add to its legacy:" [220]

He goes on, stating that:

> I've been on show - namely Witcher - where some of the writers were not or actively disliked the books and games (even actively mocking the source material.) It's a recipe for disaster and bad morale. Fandom as a litmus test checks egos, and makes all the long nights worth it.
> You have to respect the work before you're allowed to add to its legacy."

[218] r/witcher by GutBeer101, "Henry Cavill's Departure from The Witcher Originated in Season 2 2022-11-01 https://www.reddit.com/r/witcher/comments/yjd29v/henry_cavills_departure_from_the_witcher/ [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[219] Longi, Astrid."The witcher showrunner Lauren Hissrich Revealed The Struggles of Working with Henry Cavill" 2023-08-10 in *TheThings.* https://www.thethings.com/the-witcher-showrunner-lauren-hissrich-revealed-struggle-with-henry-cavill/ [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[220] Nebens, Richard. "Disney+ X-Men '97 Reboot Gets Exciting Updates From MCU Writer" in *The Direct.* 2022-10-23. https://thedirect.com/article/x-men-97-disney-reboot-mcu-update [Accessed 2023-08-14]

This is bad press for The Witcher, and fans discuss this statement from DeMayo at length.[221]

> The Witcher as an intellectual property was ripe for a good live action adaptation. Take the best aspects of the games and the books and it could have been a massive hit.
>
> ***Instead they gave the show to people who actively hate it!***
>
> Many in the fandom have suspected this to be the case for a while now. Of course the showrunner nor Netflix will admit this to be the case, but since this a comment from a ex-writer for the show, it carries some weight.
>
> What is so mind boggling about this, is that Netflix wanted the Witcher to be their very own **Game of Thrones.**
>
> **Giving the I.P to people who actively dislike it, is the worst thing you could do businesswise.[222]**

DeMayo's statement is in no way questioned, even though he had obviously quitted The Witcher as a writer for unknown reasons before making this comment about his former colleagues. The narrative that writers, who are not in it because they are fans, dislike the material that they work on and are in general too proud of themselves.

> This, sadly, is very obvious from a lot of modern adaptations. They don't hire fans, they hire people who don't care about or actively dislike the source IP and think they can tell a better story. Many times it ends up with incredible fan backlash and worst case fans walking away and the show collapsing. It doesn't matter how interesting and clever you think you are, these people aren't here for your wit, they are here for the thing that the show/movie is titled off of. It was famous before you started writing it, it didn't need you subverting expectations.[223]

2.3.2 It's a Conspiracy! Celebrity gossip and fans

Early on in Textual poachers, Henry Jenkins tackles fan gossip, especially as a type of women's culture.[224]

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[221] r/witcher by Cutiecalm "Beau DeMayo, one of the writers of the witcher show who was also hired…" 2023-10-23 https://www.reddit.com/r/witcher/comments/ybdkty/beau_demayo_one_of_the_writers_of_the_witcher/ [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[222] r/badmothafcka312
[223] t/ImNoSir
[224] Jenkins. (1992) p.80

While gossiping about scandals, the women could express the issues with the female role in society and find belonging and validation among other female fans that they were gossiping with. In this gossip, fans "offer moral judgements about the scandals surrounding interpersonal repations of characters within the series and the real-world conduct of stars during convention appearances or as revealed in commercial fan magazines."[225]

The fans usually express frustration with their limited control over the show they are watching. The gossiping among women are more about forming ties, and often they are less about the subject of the gossip itself. Gossip is also a way to talk "about yourself through evoking the actions and values of others. The same may be said of the function of television talk within the fan community."[226]

The talk itself will move on into other subjects far remote from the original subject. There is also a tradition in media to encourage gossip. Publications are produced to feed the fandoms interest and speculative discourse.[227]

But in the context of the witcher, this gossip turned into new narratives about how Hollywood as a whole is turning against fans, and how true fans like Henry Cavill are being pushed out of the industry.[228] Henry Cavill made controversial comments during the MeToo movement, he said:

> There's something wonderful about a man chasing a woman. There's a traditional approach to that, which is nice. I think a woman should be wooed and chased, but maybe I'm old-fashioned for thinking that.
>
> It's very difficult to do that if there are certain rules in place. Because then it's like: 'Well, I don't want to go up and talk to her, because I'm going to be called a rapist or something[229]

This garnered him a lot of backlash which he apologized for. However, it also cemented him as a conservative voice that speaks up against such movements, but that he, as he himself

[225] Jenkins (1992) p.80f
[226] Jenkins (1992) p.81
[227] Jenkins (1992) p.82
[228] Living Jar Cletus "The Cavill Conspiracy! Full story of Henry Cavill's Showdown with Hollywood" 2023-06-23 https://youtu.be/1ADIrbhIPBE [Accessed 2023-08-09]
[229] Baidawi, Adam. "Henry Cavill on his best life lessons: 'your head can be messed with, but it's down to me to deal with that" in GQ Australia. 2018-06-10 https://www.gq.com.au/entertainment/celebrity/henry-cavill/image-gallery/faed7f272f09bdf899c92b63a7149cba?pos=14 [accessed 2023-08-14]

said in his apology, respects women. [230] With this baggage, it is not surprising that fans would put two and two together and claim his leaving of The Witcher show as politically motivated. And, as Cavill has shown in his other interviews, he avoids talking about all the women's issues that, for instance, Sapkowski talks about.

And with that, the narrative that Sapkowski started in the Witcher has instead become one about how Characters such as Geralt are the real victim, and how actors who play characters such as Geralt also become victims, if they are fans. And, if women creators try to talk about the women in Witcher, they are stealing the show from the real fans.

2.4. Beating a dead orc – Racism, sexism, and how the American's just don't get it.

The issue of racism and sexism in fantasy is absolutely not new, it started with Tolkien and people are still discussing the ways in which Tolkien is or isn't racist. Tolkien is important here, since his books still are the foundation (going back to the theory of Fuzzy Sets) for what we call fantasy. If they are inherently racist, then it suggests that all fantasy is racist.

The first thing that tend to be brought up in this discussion is how Tolkien, the man, was explicitly against the nazis theory of the white races superiority, and other races inferiority. We know this because he wrote it in letters which have been preserved.[231] Tolkien, like Sapkowski, made sacrifices (such as not publishing his books in Germany, a large market that would have brought him money[232]), in order to make a political stance in a time when it cost him something to do so. This should, of course, be respected.

Furthermore he refuted any inspiration from media typically adored by the Nazi party, such as der Ring des Nibelungen by Wagner.[233] But of course, as Anderson Rearick III write on the subject: "It is undeniable that darkness and the colour black are continually associated throughout Tolkien's universe with unredeemable evil, specifically Orcs and the Dark Lord

[230] France, Lisa Respers. "Henry Cavill apologizes after #MeToo backlash" in CNN entertainment. 2018-06-18 https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/13/entertainment/henry-cavill-me-too-apology/index.html [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[231] Carpenter, Humphrey (ed.) Tolkien, Christopher. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981.
[232] Rearick III p. 867
[233] Carpenter (1981) p.306f

Sauron."[234] As Rearick then takes note of in his own reception study of this discourse on the racism of Tolkien – as adaptions of Tolkien's work hit the mainstream and fans start discussing the issue – the waters are muddied and participants in that discussion struggle to keep track of the texts and sources.[235] Rearick concludes that Tolkien might have preferred his own racial characteristics as a standard of beauty, but the dark forces and Orcs in particular, are based on archetypes that Tolkien found in his Judeo-Christian culture. They are not about race.

More importantly, the theme and/or message of the books are that any person with any appearance or race are important and has the power to do good deeds. [236]

However, citing Shapiro, Rearick III states that: Tolkien's intention when writing Lord of The Rings, was to "recreate a mythology for the English that had been destroyed by foreign invasion. He felt organic English Culture had been destroyed by the Normans. There is the notion that foreigners destroy culture and there was also a fantasy that there was a solid homogenous English culture there to begin with, which was not the case because there were Celts and Vikings and a host of other groups."[237] However, Rearick also makes it very clear that it is very hard to know what Tolkien's intentions were, since he has been dead for a long time. As we look at that text today, we do it through our own modern lens and therefor might struggle to understand the internal world of someone displaced from us culturally by simple merit of time having gone by.

The argument is also made that, if the books themselves seem sexist and racist, it is simply because of the way things were in the Middle ages.[238] Rearick then draws parallels to the ottoman empire and the Arabs conquering Europe. Ethnic groups fought one another in the middle ages, and that's the way it was, according to this reasoning.

An objection to this argument would of course be that, different ethnic groups during this time also traded, built alliances, travelled and lived together. Therefore, exactly what

[234] Rearick III, Anderson. "Why is the only good orc a dead orc? The dark face of racism examined in tolkien's world" from MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 50, NB. 4, Winter 2004. P.862
[235] Rearick III (2004) p.862f
[236] Rearick III (2004) p.864
[237] Rearick III (2004) p.865
[238] Rearick III (2004) p.868

conclusion to draw from this statement regarding ethnic tension and wars is somewhat unclear. Of course there was ethnic tension and war. But that's not all there was.

This discussion is important, since it suggests that the image of the medieval times does not require nuance. And to give it nuance is to betray it. That stories that draw upon the image of the medieval, and of course then, also fantasy that does the same, are simply nostalgic in a specific history. And, it is a mark of purity, a mark of being true and faithful to the era one is "adapting" into a story, by not muddying these waters either, with nuances that might challenge this collective memory of what a nation and its people used to be.

In the long run, this leads to medieval cultural symbols to seem safe and fitting to be utilized by the alt-right. An example would be Breivik, who imagined himself as a Templar knight, fighting against islam, when he murdered 77 people in 2011. [239]

The representation of the European Middle Ages is commonly discussed in fantasy. It is a discourse that surrounded HBO's massive hit Game of thrones, as well as the subject of this essay, The Witcher franchise. The women are, for instance, expected to be all white. Even though it is a fantasy with monsters of all colours. And, this is because there exists a hegemonic idea that Poland is naturally white, and that other people didn't exist in those lands during the Medieval times. And since Sapkowski's books are loosely medieval, then the correct adaption would, with this reasoning, would be the ones that are also mainly white. The Witcher show, with it's mixed casting and mixed production team with both polish and American members, with actors of many different ethnicities, challenges this hegemony. And with that fact, the notion of a more colourful medieval era, and a more colourful fantasy, becomes closer to itself becoming hegemonic. It is perhaps not strange then, that the pendulum swings back again among fans that battle producers of media, for creative control over the stories that are told.

One example of this is Nerdrotic, with 834 000 subscribers on YouTube, and his three youtubevideos "The Witcher is a DISASTER"[240], "The Witcher is DEAD"[241], "The Witcher Is

[239]Dawod, Nivette. "Breiviks uniform är en bluff" in *Aftonbladet* 2019-06-27 https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/wEvGJn/breiviks-uniform-ar-en-bluff (Accessed: 2023-07-27)
[240] Nerdrotic "The Witcher is a DISASTER" 2023-08-07 https://youtu.be/FCZWKR4YPHA [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[241] Nerdrotic "The Witcher is DEAD" 2023-06-10 https://youtu.be/qcdl3T9X6As (Accessed 2023-08-14)

DOOMED"[242]. He makes the argument that the diverse and inclusive casting only benefitted the HR department but that it doesn't reflect the source material. He then moves on, showing a clip with Henry Cavill as Cavill clutches his hands, looks down into the floor and says that, for him, "it is all about the books. I'm always of the mind, if it's not broken, don't try and fix it. And I don't think they are broken. And I absolutely love those books."[243] Nerdrotic then cuts to Hissrich, explaining that the books were written in a certain time, by a polish author, "and I had a feeling that most people imagine these people to be white only" She then goes on to explain that they are trying to tell stories where other people can also find themselves in the witcher. Nerdrotic then matches the image of each one of the poc actresses of the show against fanart, supposedly of their character, with only white women. Nerdrotic moves on to cite a voice, unclear who, that describe how The Witcher is an important part of Polish culture. As he does this, Nerdrotic show images from the Polish adaptions (the ones that have, for instance, Japanese influence in them. But Nerdrotic doesn't show those scenes.) Nerdrotic states that the studio shouldn't play at activism. It is not their place.

However, when a writer from The Witcher show talked about how it was hard to adapt the show to an American audience, because an American audience wouldn't understand the deeper cultural meanings behind each event. That He had to make cuts to make the show more accessible to them, he was violently shut down by fans that didn't like that he seemed to suggest that they are stupid because they are Americans.[244]

2.5 The Queens Realm: TikToks Glow-up and Yennefer

In *Interpreting Star Wars*, Booy describe how younger fans aren't as mad about adaptions as the older ones. It is a generational phenomena.[245] The same is true about The Witcher. On TikTok, which is a platform that we do not know that much about, users seem to tend to be

[242] Nerdrotic "The Witcher is DOOMED" 2022-12-11 https://youtu.be/ToS9J-RWbwM (Accessed 2023-08-14)
[243] Nerdrotic " The witcher is Doomed" 00:01:37
[244] Disparu, "The Witcher ATTACKS Fans Too STUPID To Praise it" 2023-08-05 https://youtu.be/Z_P6haAkt8Y [Accessed 2023-08-14]
[245] Booy (2021) p.131

younger and tend to be girls. In the response to the Witcher, TikTok's are made especially centred around Yennefer. The favourite moments seem to be when Yennefer is sold by her father, and when she has her glow-up[246] moment later in the show.[247] There is no data on the age of these fans on TikTok, however, if they were too young to have played Witcher 3 and harbour nostalgic attachments to that game, their paratextual platform that brought them into the Netflix show would be completely different. They see the show through current trends on their own platforms (such as the trend centred around Glow-ups). Their voices do not crossover from TikTok onto other social media platforms, and their opinions are not reported on in legacy media the way that other fans are.

3. Conclusion

The large YouTube channels that write provocative titles and report on nerdy things such as The Witcher and DRPGs, they draw their content from fan-run media, which draws its content from the social media of Celebrities, or from Legacy Media. As Legacy Media report on fan reaction, especially the reaction of the larger and lauder voices, that loop gets closed and the hegemonic narrative is more or less unchallenged.

Younger fans, who do not have the money to create a studio to produce fan content to attract millions of viewers on YouTube, seem to prefer TikTok. However, on TikTok they are isolated and ignored by other fans. Especially since the culture on that platform differs from that of the other platforms. The gap isn't only generational, it spatial as well. This is also indicative of a hegemonic struggle. The fans that keep apart from the hype do so for a reason, in the beginning of this hype around The Witcher, fans on reddit and on Tumblr had mixed opinions. This then died as the dominant narrative of fans of the games, much to the benefit of Henry Cavill, drowned out anything else. Their story then became the hegemonic story.

[246] Glowup is the storytelling, and real-life, trope of women, usually young women, who work hard to look better and then succeeds it. Either through plastic surgery, working out, living a less stressful live, getting a new style, getting her hair and makeup done etc.
[247] See list of TikTok's in 4.5.5 Other

What is interesting is that Henry Cavill, who had not marketed himself as a book-reader initially, still became the one that fans claim are defending the books and Sapkowski's own integrity. When Cavill, after season 1 had been released and just before season 2 was to be released, established himself in the media as a protector of the books as well, no one questioned that at all.
It is hard to say if Henry Cavill gained, what he sought to gain, by utilizing the tactics that he did. He lost a lot of jobs, and the project he has now with Warhammer 40000 is run with him and his girlfriend – who probably cannot fire him. He has gained millions of fans that support him fiercely and that feels that he is fighting for him, but, currently, that was at the price of colleagues to work with. The liminal space between fan and artist is challenged daily, but it is yet unclear what that means in the long run.

The battle for what is considered faithful to a text, is an apparent battle of hegemony. And, by using Sapkowski's name, to defend aspects of a transmedia that he did not write – but that are part of a successful Transmedia text, not only abuses the author and their intention, but it also makes the creators at CDPR invisible. Though so many of these fans that burn passionately for The Witcher 3 and CDPRs DRPGs, nowhere during this six months of observing the fandom have the names of the people behind that studio been used. In light of what Reardon and Wright wrote in their chronicle of the history of DRPGs, it might be because the fans consider themselves, first and foremost, as the creators of that game – and the developmental team behind it isn't really that important. It is the fans that keep the fandom going, and it is the fans that the studio are betraying when doing an adaption they don't like – not the text. No one has fought for CDPR's right to be credited for what they did. Instead, Sapkowski gets that credit, a credit he does not want since it makes his books, in turn, less visible than the game.

When it becomes less pleasant to be a fan of something, the text itself also becomes worse. And if the text is holy, then all other things around that text become less fun, in the typical hierarchical order with othered being the most obvious target. Speakers of antihegemonic messages comes next. The more the fandom hated the adaption, the politics, the people around The Witcher franchise, the smaller the events of love for the franchise became, until

it centred mainly on Henry Cavill, who, compared to many others, arrived rather late to the franchise.

It has been discussed how social media and its algorithm prioritize the angry content over the positive content. We do not know exactly how this is achieved but, the machinery of social media sometimes makes it less fun to be a fan. It is a masochistic circle, with actors on YouTube making more money by being more angry at a thing, claiming to be angry out of love. As they lash out they do hurt the thing they love. There are other ways to interact with creators but, clearly they do not garner as much attention, and therefor the antihegemonic argument dies.

The method:

Bringing in the personal again: I started this process by creating new accounts to monitor the response to Netflix The Witcher. But, since I have talked about doing this reception study with friends, it seems like my private Facebook messenger picked up on my interest and bombarded me with suggested Witcher material. The same thing happened to my friends that I discussed Witcher with, IF they had read the books and/or played the games. Presumably, the must have interacted with content adjacent to The Witcher or DRPGs on the platform before. Though they liked the books and the games, they might not identify as "fans" or participants in a fandom. For this reason, and probably because of the nature of my essay which we discussed (If I suggest there is non-trustworthy information going around, they will be inclined to be more suspicious,) they had received an antihegemonic perspective and thought the Witcher social media boom was bizarre and nonsensical. But even so, it didn't become more fun to talk about the Witcher, quite the opposite. It became frustrating, and then simply sad.

A Collective intelligence corrupted?

It might sound conspiratorial to some, but, considering the war in Ukraine – and Poland, their neighbour. It is not unreasonable to think that anti-NATO nations, such as Russia, would want to sabotage an American adaption of a beloved polish franchise. Because it might sully the polish publics relationship to America if their precious (they don't have many

franchises that make it into America) unique cultural artifact would fail disastrously for being “too western.” Too filled with feminist and anti-racist messaging. However, this is not something I claim to have proven, and it remains a speculation. If so, it might not be the first time that Russia, for instance, weaponized fans and fan-hate.[248] It might especially anger that political part of the world, since they have used the “gayness” of the west as an excuse to attack it. And Netflix made The Witcher more queer than the games ever were. (However there were already queer characters in the books but they were mainly women, such as Ciri herself and Phillipa Eilhart).

The issues with Paratext and large investments.

The paratexts become convoluted, and sometimes so hot with debate, that one cannot even see the text it is supposed to bridge. Then, in many instances, it seems it is the paratext that pulls the audience back into it, and very little discussion become about the actual text. In so many ways, even though the original text is claimed to be holy, it is inferior to the paratext which dominate interpretation. The act of claiming fidelity to the original text becomes a performative act seeking hegemonic approval.

Engstrom’s solution to polarization, to educate citizens about the media they are consuming. How algorithms control their filter bubbles and similar issues, is both good and completely unrealistic. Of course citizens need to be educated. But, the issue of private IP ownership pulls that solution back to a halt. If the algorithm and how it works is a secret that is privately owned, then it can never truly be thought. And the citizen can never regain the control of their media consumption and information access. This is a sad fact, but it needs to be said clearly. This is not an issue that education itself can resolve. The pressure on users is simply too high, the speed of development too fast. No one can feasibly keep track of it all. This is an issue that need political action. But that action is hard to imagine as the situation stands today. It seems more realistic to have universities or other public institutions, keep track of the situation. And guide the citizens from there. We have some institutions like that right now, but more aspects of public life need to be made aware of the vastness of this issue.

[248] Bay, Morten. “Weaponizing the haters: The Last Jedi and the strategic politicization of pop culture through social media manipulation.”in *First Monday (*Vol:23 Issue:11, 2018)

3.1 Further research

A lot of further research is needed in this field. For instance, the commodification of fan-anger on social media platforms such as YouTube needs further mapping. And with such understanding, we can start to research what can be done about it, to protect the user who deserves to not be weaponized and misused on public platforms, simply to benefit a small media company running a channel of disinformation.

More statistical data is needed on who uses the platforms and why. However, this might be invasive in nature and that should be recognized.

More studies like this need to be made on destructive events in media as a whole, if not then solely for the purpose of healing. Like in the case of Miles Booy and his interpretation of the star wars franchise, there is an opportunity to heal trauma. By studying things that are horrible we find them easier to accept. With acceptance comes resolution. This is a very real and very valuable use of research such as this.

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