

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Tlemcen



Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English
Section of English

**From Novels to Pixels: Postmodern Storytelling and the Evolving
Character in *The Witcher* Video Games**

Dissertation submitted to the department of English as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

Presented by

Mr Mohammed Amine BADSI

Supervised by

Dr Meryem MENGOUCHI

Co-Supervisor:

Dr Merwan Messaoudi

Board of Examiners

Prof. Wassila HAMZA REGUIG MOURO	Professor	President
Dr. Meryem MENGOUCHI	MAA	Supervisor
Dr. Merwan MESSAOUDI	Phd	Co-supervisor
Dr. Fatiha BELMERABET	MCA	Examiner

2022 – 2023

Dedications

To the joy this dissertation may bring to the greatest gift Allah has bestowed upon me, my parents. Your unconditional love, guidance, and sacrifices have shaped me into the person I am today. From the countless nights spent supporting me through thick and thin to the encouraging words that have fueled my determination, you have been my pillars of strength...and yes, fear not, even you dear sister, this goes to you as well. Though now I suppose I have to mention everyone.

So, to all of you, my loved ones, I dedicate this work to you all as a small token of my appreciation and gratitude.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful for the invaluable support and guidance provided by my supervisor, Dr. Meryem MENGOUCHI, without whom this work would not have come to fruition. Despite her demanding schedule, she dedicated her time and expertise to offer profound insights and assistance, greatly enriching my dissertation and enabling me to identify and rectify my mistakes. Her unwavering commitment and exceptional mentorship have been instrumental in shaping the quality and direction of this project.

Likewise, I am deeply indebted to my co-supervisor, Dr. Marwan MESSAOUDI, for his unwavering support and expertise. Despite my persistent inquiries and visits, he consistently demonstrated remarkable understanding and passion, aligning with our shared enthusiasm for video games. His guidance, encouragement, and dedication were crucial in the accomplishment of this work.

I would like to extend my sincere acknowledgment to the esteemed members of my thesis jury,

Prof. Wassila Hamza Reguig Mouro, your extensive expertise in Discourse in the novel brings a wealth of knowledge and insight into the evaluation of my thesis. Your distinguished academic career and contributions to the field have served as an inspiration throughout my research journey.

Dr. Fatiha Belmerabet, your dedication to academic excellence and your commitment to fostering intellectual growth are commendable.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have my work evaluated by such distinguished scholars and experts in their respective fields. Your presence on the jury panel adds credibility and ensures the rigorous evaluation of my research.

Abstract

The evolution of storytelling in video games has undergone a substantial transformation over the years, incorporating various artistic movements and techniques to engage players in immersive narratives. One of the significant movements that challenge traditional storytelling structures and embrace subjective interpretation is Postmodernism. This dissertation examines the impact of postmodernism on storytelling in video games, particularly in relation to character development. By embracing subjective interpretation and rejecting the notion of one objective truth, postmodernism has transformed storytelling in various mediums. In video games, characters play a crucial role in evoking emotions and engaging the player. This research focuses on Geralt of Rivia, a renowned character from the Witcher fantasy novels by Andrzej Sapkowski and explores how video games as a medium enhance his already established identity. Through in-depth psychoanalytical analysis, the dissertation highlights the significance of multifaceted characters and their ability to immerse consumers in the story. The video game adaptation by CD Projekt RED offers players the option to either follow Geralt as depicted in the books or customize their own interpretation of the character. By comparing these approaches, the dissertation demonstrates how such elements enhance the player's attachment and investment in the character.

Table of Contents

Dedications	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Storytelling and Video Games through Identity, Consumer Culture, and Fantasy.....	6
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Postmodernism and Literature.....	8
1.2.1 Postmodernism and Art	9
1.2.2 Video Games as A Medium of Storytelling in Postmodernism	10
1.3 Storytelling and the Reader’s Subjectivity	11
1.3.1 Storytelling and Agency in Video Games.....	12
1.3.2 Storytelling Through Video Game Mechanics (Ludology)	13
1.3.3 Storytelling in Postmodernist Literature Between the Novel and Game	15
1.3.4 Interactions Between Novel & Game.....	16
1.3.5 Narration in Videogames.....	17
1.3.6 Player and Character Attachments in Videogames	18
1.4 Ludology, Narratology Dilemma	19
1.5 Metafiction in Videogames	21

1.6 Alternate Reality.....	23
1.7 Open-Endedness in Postmodern Literature	25
1.8 Characterization.....	28
1.8.1 Compelling Characters	29
1.8.2 Representations of Characters in Postmodernist Literature	30
1.8.3 The Representation of Postmodernist Characters in Video Games	31
1.9 Consumer Culture and Consumerism in The Twenty-First Century	33
1.9.1 Character and Identity in the Digital Era.....	35
1.10 Fantasy Literature as a Source of Entertainment in The Twenty/Twenty-First Century	37
1.11 Conclusion	44
Chapter Two: Characters in <i>The Witcher</i> : Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation	46
2.1 Introduction	47
2.2 Unveiling the Significance of Characters in <i>The Witcher</i> Series	48
2.2.3 Geralt Of Rivia	50
2.2.3Dandelion (Jaskir).....	72
2.2.4 Yennefer of Vengerberg	78
2.2.5 Triss Merigold	81
2.2.6 Cirilla	83
2.3 Conclusion.....	84
Chapter Three: Character Customization in <i>The Witcher</i> Video Games	86
3.1 Introduction	87

3.2 From Skepticism to Sapkowski’s Reflections on <i>The Witcher</i> Games Disappointment	89
3.3 Cd Projekt Red The <i>Witcher</i> Series	90
3.3.1 <i>The Witcher 1</i> (2007) Plot	91
3.3.2 <i>The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings</i> (2011) Plot	92
3.4 From Pages to Pixels: <i>Witcher</i> Novels Enrich <i>Wild Hunt 3</i>	93
3.5 Rewriting Destiny: <i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i> ’s Interactive Narrative and Player Agency	100
3.6 Blurring Boundaries: The Power of Customization in <i>The Witcher - Bridging The Gap Between Player And Geralt Of Rivia</i>	106
3.6.1 Facial hair	106
3.6.2 Armor and Weapons	107
3.6.3 The Combat System.....	110
3.7 Destiny’s Crossroads: Exploring the Diverse Endings of <i>The Witcher 3 : Wild Hunt</i>	111
3.8 Conclusion	114
General Conclusion	116
Works Cited.....	119

List of Figures

Figure 1: Geralt “running out of juice”	95
Figure 2 : Geralt making a comment about Yennefer’s black and white clothes	95
Figure 3: Geralt interacting with Yennefer’s lilac and gooseberries perfume.	96
Figure 4: The character index in alphabetical order on the left and the Dandelion’s description on the right.	97
Figure 5: An example of a cursed monster called Botchling with its description to the right and vulnerabilities at the bottom.	98
Figure 6: Ciri meets the little girl	99
Figure 7: A book entitled ROYAL LINEAGES OF THE NORTH describing the background of Ciri’s characters as depicted in the books	100
Figure 8: An example of the branching narrative of <i>the Witcher 3</i> (Millard, The Narrative Structure of <i>The Witcher 3</i>)	101
Figure 9: The player choosing to continue Geralt and Yennefer’s romance or to break it. (xLetalis).....	102
Figure 10: Geralt has to make a decision of whether to take the coin or reject it (xLetalis).	104
Figure 11: Geralt being discriminated, while having three options to choose from: taking the challenge head on, de-ascelating, or using one of the magical signs to hypnotize the mobsters.	105
Figure 12: A list of hairstyles which the player can choose from.	107
Figure 13: A list of hairstyles which the player can choose from.	108
Figure 14: The lady of the lake emerging from water to give Geralt Aerondight.	109
Figure 15: The Witcher 3 Endings Pathway.....	113

General Introduction

Traditional writing as a form of expression prioritizes the author's intention and authority, assuming a fixed and singular meaning to be derived from the text. The reader in such literature is regarded as a passive recipient of the author's message, lacking any ability to interpret or interact with the text. With the rise of postmodernism, the author's complete sovereignty was overthrown, and the audience were the ones sitting on the throne. The audience's perspectives, experiences, and cultural contexts became integral to the interpretation of a text.

Each individual possesses his/her own degree of subjectivity forged by personal experiences, therefore, the same piece of writing might be interpreted in various ways depending on the angle of the individual perceiving it. In the context of literature, this subjective nature is channeled into the characters within the narrative of the story. What makes a plot more appealing to the reader is arguably his/her ability to relate and resonate with the character (s).

The higher the similarity, the more invested the reader will be. By seeing the character going through similar experiences that an individual was subjected to, various emotions of empathy, connection, and personal reflection can be evoked. This sense of empathy, however, varies in degrees. For instance, a person may sympathize or empathize with a character within a story on a mere humanitarian level and not a personal one.

Postmodernism's emergence in the late twentieth century was simultaneous with an era characterized with rapid technological advancement, specifically the digitalization of various aspects of society. The digital, virtual world has become the main source of entertainment for many. The video game wave took the world by storm around the 1980s, at that time, video games were merely known for their entertainment value, i.e., mashing buttons to victory and achieving a high score with the narrative aspect holding little to no importance by the developers, which renders it an escapist medium. With time however, not only there was an immense improvement, in the hardware and graphic department, storytelling became an essential component in order to achieve a successful and profitable

game. In fact, as of today, there are many sophisticated critics dedicated solely to reviewing the narrative of video games.

The video game narrative stands apart from traditional mediums of storytelling in several distinctive ways. While traditional mediums like books, films, and TV shows present narratives that are largely passive experiences for the audience, video game narratives offer an active and participatory engagement for players. One significant difference lies in the interactivity of video game narratives. Unlike reading a book or watching a film where the audience is a passive observer, video game players become active participants within the narrative. They have agency and control over the actions and decisions of the protagonist, which directly influence the unfolding story. This interactivity grants players a sense of agency, immersion, and investment in the narrative, as they shape the outcome through their choices and gameplay.

The aim of this research is to explore the importance of relatable characters within a narrative of a story and to what extent the consumer's personal subjectivity contribute to the relatability. It also seeks to examine whether the interactive nature of video games as a medium which provides the player with unique assets such as a degree of agency over the unfolding story, and customizable features can enhance the overall investment in the story. In order to investigate this thesis, the *Witcher* series by Andrzej Sapkowski was chosen as a case study for three reasons; its defiance to the clichés of fairy tales, the author's realistic characters depiction, lastly, the existence of a video game adaptation to the franchise by CD Projekt RED, which makes the comparison of the mediums fair. This comparison triggers the following questions:

- What role does the realistic depiction of characters in *the Witcher* series by Andrzej Sapkowski play in enhancing their relatability and the readers' connection to them?

- How does the video game adaptation of *the Witcher* series by CD Projekt RED contribute to the sense of relatability and investment in the story when compared to the original literary work?
- How does the interactive nature of video games, including player agency and customizable features, impact the level of investment and immersion in the narrative?

In order to address these research questions, this study focused on analyzing the characters within *the Witcher* original literary works by Andrzej, and comparing their portrayal in the video game adaptation by CD Projekt RED. By examining the characters' traits, development, and interactions in both mediums, this study aimed to identify the similarities and differences, highlighting the ways in which the characters were brought to life in the interactive video game adaptation.

The methodology employed in this study utilizes a combination of psychoanalytical analysis and a comparative approach. It involves conducting a textual analysis of the books and an analysis of gameplay in the video games. By employing these methods, this research attempts to explore and uncover the ways in which the video game adaptation enhances the overall sense of identification with the story.

To reach its focal point, the research was divided into three chapters, theoretical and practical. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to the concept of postmodernism, and how it revolutionized storytelling in literature, in addition to paving the way for video games to be considered as a medium of expression. It then transitions from narrative to the importance of compelling characters in weaving a relatable captivating plot line. This is achieved by exploring the impact of subjectivity in identifying with the characters within the narrative followed by a juxtaposition of the video games medium to showcase the potential of enhancing subjectivity. In the second chapter, an analysis of the main characters from *the Witcher* series was conducted to showcase the significance of

grounding fictional characters in realistic measures to the overall relatability and investment in the story. The third chapter concludes with an analysis of *the Witcher* games, exploring their similarities with the source material and examining the impact of video games as a medium in enhancing the sense of relatability.

**Chapter One: Storytelling and Video Games
through Identity, Consumer Culture, and
Fantasy**

1.1 Introduction

It is a given that time is finite as such, one can never experience all that life has to offer. The question of *what if*, and *if only* are for the most part a looming specter, a shadow that is always creeping into the back of the human mind. According to Happify, a website focused on promoting happiness, it revealed that 90% of people report having major regrets in their lives. The result of this survey indicates that most individuals will not get the chance to truly fulfill or explore the full potential of their curiosity and imagination; of what it is like to experience life from multiple angles and alternative perspectives.

It can be, therefore, understood why fiction has always been a popular outlet for those seeking to quench the thirst for lodging in a realm different than their own. Egan Schmidt asserts that reading literary fiction “has the capacity to transport you into another character’s mind, allowing you to see and feel what they do” (*Discover Magazine*) She explains that while emerging with the character, their reality becomes our own and we get to experience the world first hand from the perspective of a verity of social identities such as different “gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, profession or age” (*Discover Magazine*) In addition to undergoing the emotional aspect of their lives (grief, excitement, pain, love...).

It is important to highlight however, that not everyone who is transported into the character’s mind will have the same emotional reaction to the story as each individual has a unique set of feelings, morals, beliefs and experiences which renders them subjective towards the point of view of the persona (Baldwin). This fragmented view of human subjectivity as Mary Klages affirmed in her work *Postmodernism* that its emergence in literature sparked in the era of modernism in works such as Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and *The Wasteland* by T. S. Eliot (1965). She emphasizes however that writers at that time, “...presents that fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented

and mourned as a loss” (165), unlike its counterpart, postmodernism which “...doesn’t lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that” (166).

Chapter One of this dissertation serves as an introduction to the research topics and themes that will be discussed in the study. It prepares the reader for the analysis on how postmodernism has impacted storytelling in video games, specifically in terms of character development. The chapter begins by examining how postmodernism has influenced literature and art, changing traditional storytelling structures. It then focuses on video games as a medium for postmodern storytelling, highlighting the significance of subjectivity and player agency. The chapter also discusses video game mechanics, representation, narration, player attachment and immersion, and the debate between ludology and narratology in video game studies. It briefly touches on the presence of metafiction and alternate reality in video games. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of characterization in postmodern literature and video games, as well as the influence of consumer culture and fantasy literature on character development in the digital age. Overall, this chapter sets the stage for a detailed exploration of postmodern storytelling and character development in video games.

1.2 Postmodernism and Literature

Canadian-American philosopher Stephen Hicks affirms that According to many experts, we are currently in a new intellectual era known as postmodernism. This era is seen as a departure from the constraints of the past, but also carries a sense of unease about what the future holds. Even those who disagree with postmodernism acknowledge that there has been a shift in the intellectual landscape. (1). Postmodernism rejects the idea that reason or any other method can provide objective knowledge about reality. Instead, it

focuses on social and linguistic constructs, emphasizing the subjective nature, conventionality, and lack of comparison between these constructions (5).

Postmodernism is known for its break from “the value systems and structures that have guided society and culture through large parts of history” (Vara 1). This break essentially questions and challenges the previously established norms, especially in art and literature. The meaning art conveys no longer solely laid in the hands of the artist, rather, the consumer also determines that meaning from his perspective, subjectivity, and experience.

Its literature was characterized by the use of metafiction (*If One a Winters’s night traveler* by Italo Calvino), unreliable narration (*Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut), self-reflexivity (*The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon), intertextuality, and paradox (*Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace). In the same vein, in his book *Postmodern Theory and Blade Runner* Matthew Flisfeder states that postmodernism theory “draws attention to media representation as constitutive of our experiences of reality, and likewise challenges representations of traditional conceptions of subjectivity and identity.” (22).

This implies that the work projected by the writer will always have multiple interpretations based on the experience and subjectivity of the individuals in what he calls a “readerly and pluralistic approach to the text” (24). According to thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, the author’s role in work is considered dead just like the subject, which indicates that the author’s perspective or intention holds less importance compared to the interpretation and understanding of the reader (Flisfeder 24).

1.2.1 Postmodernism and Art

Another aspect of postmodernism is its aim to blur or eradicate what was established in modernism as high and low form of art. An example of the latter would be the genre of

fantasy as Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn explain in their book *Cambridge Companions to Literature* “But fantasy has almost always been considered popular literature, a ‘low’ art form concerned with play and desire in this way, fantasy is itself postmodern.” (139). From this postmodern perspective, one can argue and deflect the claims and arguments of critics such as Roger Ebert that maintained that “games are not art”, yet after the backlash he received he proclaimed “I still believe this, but I should never have said so. Some opinions are best kept to yourself.” (*RogerEbert*). The focus is therefore on the subjective experience of the reader “which are neither authentic nor inauthentic, but seen simply as affective.” (Flisfider, 22)

1.2.2 Video Games as A Medium of Storytelling in Postmodernism

The nature of postmodernism which criticizes the grand narratives and reject the existence of a single unified reality, truth, and meaning alongside its emergence in an age of digitalization coincided smoothly with the rise of video games.

Its nature and characteristics became a suitable output and medium to carry the traits of postmodernist literature and flow in an intertwined stream. Video games have come a long way from the days of moving intangible pixels and mashing buttons to victory to becoming a sophisticated storytelling medium, Steve Ince the author of *Writing for Video Games* (2007) points out that “Though writing and storytelling appears in games from the early 1980s, it was actually done by the programmer or the designer who put the game together and unless this person had natural writing skills such games were unlikely to be known for the quality of their writing.” (4). With the appearance of popular games such as *The last of Us*, *God of War*, and *Red Dead Redemption 2*, there is no doubt that video-game narratives compete with the high-quality storytelling and writing of the contemporary era.

What makes the platform of video games stands out in a postmodern world, in addition to its competitive writing and storytelling with other mediums, is its participatory

nature which turns the consumer from a passive recipient to an active engager. This particular part highlights the point of Matthew Flisfeder in regards to the author having full authorship over the course of the narrative (24), as in some genres of video games, the player is not entirely limited to one plot but has a set of options to choose, in what is known as the branching narrative, rendering him an active force in shaping the outcome of the plot, and in turn making the author less involved in directing the narrative (Andrews 17). Research assistant Rebecca Hoffman from the Center for Games & Impact in Arizona State University claims “The video game is a newborn medium... it is one that introduces a unique ability to cultivate interactivity between the audience and the narrative.” (*GamesandImpact*)

1.3 Storytelling and the Reader’s Subjectivity

Poet, storyteller, and screenwriter Sean Glatch in his article Capturing the art of storytelling: Techniques & Tips maintains that “Storytelling is the process of weaving language into a concrete narrative, with the purpose of creating rich, believable experiences.” (Glatch). The quote highlights the essence of storytelling as a profound artistic endeavor. Glatch’s perspective emphasizes the profound significance of storytelling in constructing immersive and authentic narratives. This craft relies on the skillful use of words to create tangible experiences that captivate and engage the audience. By highlighting the power of storytelling, Glatch aligns with the broader perception of this art form as a means of exploring diverse perspectives and evoking a range of emotions through the medium of language.

It can be argued that a major element in the success of the novel, since its emergence, is its believability and realism. Simulating lifelike stories, and characters that, share our same struggles, and have conflicting desires, illustrate the essence of human complexity “because it echoes life” (Kress 53). The believable experiences, however, can be argued

that are not always achieved in the postmodern consumer, since as it was mentioned previously, that part is subjective and so the satisfaction of a character's resolution may be received positively, negatively or even neutrally based on the individual's biases. To give an example; the fate of Elizabeth and Darcy from "*Pride and Prejudice*" by Jane Austen in which the resolve of the two characters is them getting married and living happily ever after. A reader, and based on his own, scrutiny and preferences might see that Mr. Darcy is not the right person for Elizabeth and that a better outcome for her would be to remain single, focusing on her personal growth and independence.

In her book *Write Great Fiction - Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint* Nancy Kress states that "People can want conflicting things, feel conflicting things, and change what they want or feel over time. Nobody is a monolith—although some people are considerably more complicated than others" (52). This conflict in the reader can gradually occur as the plot of the story develops and more information are being presented which can change the course of the narrative and both the feelings and perception towards a character's ordeal, circumstance, or situation can change. For instance, when the story unveils a tragic backstory, the reader's hatred towards the villain can transform into sympathy.

1.3.1 Storytelling and Agency in Video Games

In the context of video games, agency refers to the degree to which a player is able to cause significant change or exert control over the game world and its narrative. It involves giving players the freedom to make meaningful decisions and have their actions and choices impact the outcome of the game. Player agency is about empowering players and providing them with the time, space, and resources necessary to make decisions within the game. It's worth noting that agency can have different scopes within a game. It can refer to player agency, which encompasses overall player control and decision-making, as well as character agency, plot agency, and world agency, which focus on the autonomy and

impact of the player's character, the narrative progression, and the game world itself (“What Is Player Agency? &Mdash; University XP”)

The sudden change of events and motivation in the reader’s heart is taken into consideration in the world of video games wherein the player is given the option to make a motivationally driven decision based on his/her own biases and subjectivity to the unfolding story. Such is the case in the game *Detroit Become Human* by Quantic Dream where in one scene, players must decide whether to remain peaceful or to become violent during a protest. This decision affects the outcome of the story and the relationship between the androids and humans. “Although interactivity is not ‘to touch’ in its literal form, it does allow the player to interfere in the world, into the story itself at some point.” (Messaoudi and Medjahed 94).

This ability to make the choice for the character can tether the player to the virtual world of the story and makes him/her more invested as the rights and wrongs and even the fate of the character lays entirely in his/her hands making him/her either gloat success or mourn failure. By embracing the vast potential of video game narratives, individuals can broaden their perspectives and unlock a realm where stories unfold in ways that can rival traditional mediums such as the novel.

1.3.2 Storytelling Through Video Game Mechanics (Ludology)

Murray In *Hamlet on the Holodeck* 1997, states “To play Mario Brothers or King’s Quest is to open ourselves to the vision of the shaping author in the same way we open ourselves to the author’s voice in the novel” (Murray. qtd in Mukherjee 12). Videogames

mechanics¹ and other gameplay attributes should, too, be critically scrutinized as they tell a story of their own. Only by being meticulous and treating the game as a piece of literature can one spot what the game developers intended by planting a certain element as part of the story.

An example of this would be from the game *Brothers a Tale of Two Sons*; an adventure game developed in 2013 by Starbreeze Studios and published by 505 Games. The game allows the player to control two brothers simultaneously, yet moving each one separately with the two analog sticks of the controller. The little brother with the left and the big brother with the right. One aspect of the story is that the little brother is scared of water and cannot swim so whenever there is an area with water the little brother hops into the big brother's back and gets carried for the rest of the way. When the big brother dies amidst the story, however, the little brother becomes the only playable character and so the only functional analog stick is that of the little brother (left). As the game progress and the gamer encounters an aquatic area once again, the younger brother is still afraid and unable of proceeding forward that is unless the player move the right analog (that of the big brother) only then the player can cross the path swimming.

This illustrates the value judgment of how storytelling through video games can be conveyed subtly. If one does not acknowledge the medium as a storytelling platform and fails to take a moment for introspection and reflection, a significant portion of the tropes intended by the game's author may be easily overlooked. When exploring video games

¹ In the world of video games, mechanics are the set of rules and systems that dictate how the game functions and how players engage with it. These mechanics form the core of gameplay, dictating the choices and abilities that players have. Things like movement, fighting, puzzles, managing resources, progression, and other elements are all included in game mechanics.

storytelling techniques, an intriguing aspect to consider is that of the differences and similarities between story telling in traditional mediums and video games.

1.3.3 Storytelling in Postmodernist Literature Between the Novel and Game

Storytelling, both in modernism and postmodernism includes emphasis on “pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony, and playfulness” (Klages 165). Additionally, art in the postmodern era puts “reflexivity and self-consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity” as its main priority (Klages 165). These tropes are employed by popular writers such as Ridley Scott, producer of “*Blade Runner*”, an adaptation of the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1968 by Philip K. Dick, a postmodern novel that combines elements of film noir, science fiction, and postmodern philosophy to create a dystopian vision of the future that challenges traditional narratives of progress and enlightenment.

This can similarly be found in the video game *Cyberpunk 2077* by CD Projekt Red, which also incorporates many of the postmodern aspects such as fragmentation, and metafiction into the game. Each work shares similar themes and tropes; they both share a story that occurs in a dystopian future dominated by advanced technology where the protagonists Rick Deckard, and V explore and navigate complex and often dangerous environments, in pursuit of answers and meaning. Structure-wise, both employ nonlinear narrative structures, multiple perspectives, and a range of visual and narrative techniques to create immersive and thought-provoking worlds that challenge the viewer’s assumptions about reality and humanity. When the two stories are set side by side it becomes a matter of mere intertextuality. When the medium factor is employed and the player agency is included, however, both the character and meaning of the story are altered.

First and foremost, the protagonist V’s gender, appearance, and backstory can be customized, in other words, V is what the player wants it to be, and it could be argued that the character having a single-letter name was done to make the gamer forget that he/she is

playing a separate character, instead he/she is becoming that playable character. He also gets to determine the appearance based on his preference, subjectivity, and biases. Moreover, the players gets to choose the lifestyle they want to lead. There are three options. The first is Corpo which are Members of the Night City corporate elite, concerned with money, power, and climbing the upper echelons of society. Second is Streetkid, they are Night City natives involved in petty crime like carjacking and other illicit activities. Finally, Nomad; outsiders form clans in the desert badlands surrounding Night City. (Billcliffe). Furthermore, it is the player who is making decisions throughout the game. With each action made by the player, the plot, the relationship and the interaction between the characters are constantly changing to generate a unique outcome of that action.

The video game's immersive and interactive nature shines through its player-driven narrative approach, allowing players to customize the protagonist's identity, appearance, and lifestyle. By prioritizing player choice and consequences, the plot evolves dynamically with each decision made. This unique storytelling style unlocks new avenues for exploring the narrative possibilities of video games while captivating audiences in exciting new ways.

1.3.4 Interactions Between Novel & Game

It is established that all the aspects of the novel can be found in video games. Interactivity, then, is the key that set the two mediums apart; "While it is true that the reader will turn the page or the viewer may replay a scene on the DVD, this is only an interaction with the means of delivery and not an interaction with the world or the characters contained within it." (Ince 13). The plot written by the author in the novel, therefore, is meant to be experienced the same by all the consumers, unlike in video games where the player is an essential cog that drives and alters the plot through the interaction with the world and its characters, making each action generate a different outcome that can be considered a unique experience for each player (Ince 13). To Thabet, however, this matter of "interactivity" is

“dull” and does not do justice to the world of video games. He highlights this point in his book *Video Game Narrative and Criticism* 2015 by stating that “The fear, rage, guilt, ecstasy, vengeance, goodwill, malice, and buffoonery that we personally deal with in-game stories, in the midst of cliffhanging perils and dreads, must be more than interactions— at least for the student of narrative and criticism.” (2).

The emotional experiences and complexities within video game stories go beyond mere interactions, particularly for those studying narrative and criticism. This emphasizes the importance of examining the role of narration in video games, where storytelling transcends traditional notions of interactivity.

1.3.5 Narration in Videogames

One could argue that what makes narration in video games unique is that the player “assumes the roles of a co-narrator and protagonist”. (Thabet 4). Having the ability to go a certain path or make a decision puts the player in the shoes of a narrator, while simultaneously, being the main character puts a degree of ownership, responsibility, challenge, and motivation to see the story through. The story narrative of a video game, unlike the traditional plot of the novel, possesses a greater aptitude to be revisited as the ending of a story is not static, rather, it can always be altered based on the choices made by the player. In this sense, the story can be experienced more than once while still giving that thrilling anticipation of an unknown ending.

Moreover, major parts of the story can be missed in the player’s first play through, as the developers of the game may place implicit lore details, which can be missed in the first gameplay, for they are scattered throughout the game’s world in the form of dialogues with secondary or minor characters, secret passages, letters, documents, journals, intractable prompts. In other words, within some games, the players are not guided and directed to some major or minor details of the story but are left to their own accord and

curiosity to navigate and search for them. The more the player explores, the more hidden details and subtle allusions are revealed. For instance, seemingly trivial, one-dimensional characters (NPCs²) will become rich and multidimensional, through, for example, side quests that are separate from the main story.

Whether it's through impactful dialogue, character development arcs, or the consequences of player choices, characters in video games play a pivotal role in driving the narrative forward and engaging players on a profound level. It is through these character attachments that players are drawn deeper into the story and become active participants in shaping their own narrative experiences.

1.3.6 Player and Character Attachments in Videogames

The ability to explore, navigate and roam the atmosphere and the world in which the story is being told does certainly add to the immersion of a story but an immersive world without well-rounded and complex characters falls flat. It is arguable then that the characters within a story are what keeps the readers hooked. Alabama-born writer Mandy Shunnarah claims that

It's much easier to like characters that remind us of ourselves or have motivations, value systems, struggles, and backgrounds similar to ours. The ability to see yourself in books (regardless of genre, but especially fiction) is a beautiful thing and I hope every reader has the experience of feeling understood on a deep level through reading. (*Off the beaten shelf*)

² Non player character(s)

Video games acknowledge this idea of similarity and capitalize on it. For instance, they take an already established and relatable character of a series such as Geralt from *The Witcher*. Through the element of player agency, they make him even more identifiable with the player by creating a personal bond. The autonomy given to the player to make consequential altering choices and customizable features gives players a greater attachment to the video game characters than that of the novel. The players will feel more invested and involved as the character becomes a part of them. Thabet encapsulates this notion by stating, “With such impunity, millions of players traverse the fictional landscapes of video games every day in search of the experience of being someone else” (Thabet 2).

When engaging with a movie or a book, the consumer assumes a passive role, observing the main character’s interactions with their world as dictated by the narrative. However, in the realm of gaming, he/she become an active participant embodying the character. While certain games have predetermined storylines, the player still retains control over the character’s movements. In contrast, role-playing games offer the freedom to assume any desired persona, including oneself, and make decisions reflective of personal choices within the given scenario. Consequently, in gaming, players truly become the protagonists of their own narrative. This immersive quality is unique to games and sets them apart from movies, which lack the same level of interactivity. (Lindblad)

While becoming emotionally invested in the characters, a thought-provoking question arises about the essence of storytelling. The inquiry revolves around the suitability of examining video game narratives through the lens of narrative (narratology) or gameplay mechanics (ludology).

1.4 Ludology, Narratology Dilemma

Researchers and academics in both respected fields debated on the issue of whether to perceive video games either from a narratological or ludological standpoint. Researcher

from the University of Southern Mississippi J. Andrews contends "... audiologists such as Gonzolo Frasca believe that researchers ought to treat video games not as narrative texts but instead as rules-based systems structured around gameplay mechanics rather than representational narratives" (1). He proceeds to elaborate that the games which fall under the umbrella of ludology incorporate games similar to sports games which "are purely based on rules, with the player's enjoyment stemming from their interactions with the game's rule set and challenges" (1). It then, ostensibly, boils down to a matter of genres. For instance, adventure games, are often focused on storytelling and puzzle-solving, with the player character typically navigating a series of environments and interacting with a variety of characters. These games often have a strong emphasis on narrative and character development, with the player's choices affecting the story's outcome.

In the genre of role-player games (RPG), the focus is on building a character customized to the preference of the player and evolving it, with the player assuming the role of that character within the narrative of the story. Interactive fiction games are primarily focused on storytelling and often take the form of text-based adventures that allow players to influence the direction of the story through their decisions. These categories of games are often highly immersive and can be very narrative-driven, as such it is unsurprising why "On the opposite end of the spectrum, narrativist view video games as a medium inherently predisposed to telling stories" (J. Andrews 1).

In recent game studies, however, Oliver Laas (2014) suggests that current research on video games is increasingly using comprehensive approaches that consider all aspects of games, integrating theories that address both the emphasis on mechanics of game design and the emphasis on narrative storytelling. This trend takes into account the viewpoints of both audiologists and narratives, bringing together different perspectives to better understand the complexity of video games (qtd. in J. Andrews 1). With scholars now embracing comprehensive approaches that bridge the viewpoints of ludologists and

narrativists, the path to explore other storytelling techniques such as metafiction in video games is illuminated.

1.5 Metafiction in Videogames

The term "metafiction," as defined by British literary critic Patricia Waugh in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, refers to a type of fiction that deliberately draws attention to itself as a work of art in order to explore the relationship between fiction and reality. These works critique their own construction and also consider the idea that the world outside of the story may also be fictional (2).

Metafiction explores questions about the nature of reality by examining its own structure and the ways in which it is influenced by philosophy, language, and literature. It suggests that studying characters in novels can help us understand how subjectivity is constructed in the real world. It also proposes that literature, which is entirely made up of language, can provide insights into the construction of reality. (3)

The connection between postmodernism and consciousness has been examined in terms of how the postmodern era affects our understanding of the present moment. This perspective acknowledges that postmodern experiences vary among different societies based on their unique historical and cultural contexts.

Bogost and Kunzelman, as noted by Vara's research *Postmodernism in Videogame Narratives*, argue that video games are limited by their creators. In other words, the creators of video games still limit the actions that players can perform. This makes the player walk an already predetermined script, which the developers intended. In what could be a great display of metafiction's self-consciousness, the game *Bioshock* can be a prime example of acknowledging this issue. The game tells a story that explains why the player is taking actions. This reduces the influence of the developers.

The video game *Bioshock*, developed by 2K Boston and 2K Australia, is a 2007 first-person shooter set in the underwater city of Rapture. The protagonist, Jack, finds himself stranded in Rapture after surviving a plane crash. The city is in disarray, overrun by genetically enhanced humans called Splicers and governed by Andrew Ryan, a staunch advocate of individualism and free-market capitalism. The game follows Jack as he is guided by a man named Atlas, who assists him in navigating the perilous city.

Although players have the ability to make choices that can alter the story's outcome, the plot remains primarily straightforward and linear. Players must adhere to the commands given through Atlas's radio. The game acknowledges that players are limited to the developers' intended events, leading to a significant plot twist near the end. It is revealed that Jack has been brainwashed and controlled by Atlas, who is ultimately unveiled as the main antagonist, Frank Fontaine. The trigger phrase "would you kindly" was used to manipulate Jack's actions throughout the gameplay, merging the player's decisions with the story rather than merely following the developers' predetermined path.

Adding to the richness of the narrative, *Bioshock* incorporates intertextuality³ and allusion⁴ by referencing various literary, philosophical, and cultural sources. These include

³ Intertextuality refers to the phenomenon of one text referencing, quoting, or alluding to another text. It is the interplay and interconnectedness between different texts, where the meaning of one text is shaped or influenced by its relationship with other texts. ("StudySmarter US")

⁴ Allusion in literature is when an author makes a reference to something or someone indirectly, relying on the reader's prior knowledge to add meaning or depth to the text.

An allusion is a reference to something well-known, such as a character, event, quote, or symbol. It is used to evoke emotions, convey complex ideas, or add more meaning to a text by using shared cultural knowledge.

Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy⁵, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 1949, and Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* 1870. These references not only enhance the depth and complexity of the game's storyline but also provide commentary and critique on these works and their underlying ideologies. Furthermore, the meta-fictional elements in *Bioshock* offer a glimpse into the storytelling potential of video games, paving the way for immersive experiences like those found in virtual reality.

1.6 Alternate Reality

With postmodernism's rejection of an objective reality, and the rapid acceleration of digital gadgets in the contemporary age one can only assume what the future of video games and virtual holds and with the emergence of VR (Virtual Reality) headsets, the horizon appears to be boundless. The advancements in immersive technologies have generated significant interest among scholars in the realm of virtual reality (VR). While VR itself is not a new concept, recent developments in visualization and interactive capabilities, particularly through the latest VR head-mounted displays like HTC Vive or Oculus Rift, have greatly enhanced the potential for immersive experiences. Immersion, characterized by the user's deep engagement in a virtual environment, often leads to a detachment from time and the real world, fostering a profound sense of "being" within the virtual context.

⁵ Objectivism is a philosophical system associated with Ayn Rand, a 20th-century Russian-born American writer, primarily known for her novels "The Fountainhead" and "Atlas Shrugged." It encompasses metaphysical realism, epistemological realism, ethical egoism, individualism, and laissez-faire capitalism. Objectivism also explores aesthetics, philosophy of love and sex, and presents a controversial perspective on moral virtues, considering selfishness as a virtue and altruism as a vice.

As defined by Laura Freina and Michela Ott, immersion can be understood as the perception of physical presence in a non-physical world, achieved through the use of stimuli such as images, sound, and other sensory inputs, thereby creating a genuine feeling of “being there” for the participant. (Radianti et al. 2). These headsets enable users to freely rotate their perspective and explore their surroundings, creating a lifelike experience akin to the real world. Primarily employed in the realm of gaming, they represent a revolutionary advancement within the field of video games.

Another extension of these headsets are controllers that are different from the traditional joysticks: they go beyond the technology of mashing buttons for to execute an action, instead, they offer the ability of controlling and engaging through motion control. One of these motion tracking controllers is the Oculus Touch, for the Oculus Rift, it consists of two controllers (left, and right) with each side having a thumb stick, two buttons, a trigger, and an analog stick, as well as motion sensors and haptic feedback to simulate the sensation of touch.

This allows users to interact with virtual objects and environments more naturally and intuitively. They are also designed to be comfortable to hold and easy to use, with ergonomic grips and buttons that are within an easy reach. As a result, users can get so immersed to the point of potentially forgetting they are in a virtual reality. As a result, their bodies might react instinctively to the virtual threat encountered in the game as if it is genuine. This level of immersion can lead to emotions beyond the ones Thabet mentioned on page 6, to include a feeling of a life-or-death situation and a fight for survival. This level of submersion not only makes the player live and empathize with the character but essentially *be* the character, further deepening the bond of attachment between character/consumer, further blurring the line between fiction/reality.

Moving from VR and immersion to postmodern writing, the emphasis now shifts to open-endedness, an approach used in postmodern writing for both narrative strategy and

style. While exploring the subject matter, the discussion will adopt an objective and academic perspective.

1.7 Open-Endedness in Postmodern Literature

Postmodernism challenges the concept of absolute truth. It opposes the notion of a single, authoritative narrative and instead embraces a fragmented and diverse perspective on reality. Philosopher Bogdan Popoveniuc claims “The cultural rebellion from literature and arts, and some parts of philosophy against this implacable progress of things is more a cultural reaction to the unfulfilled promises of modernity.” (8).

Open-endedness in postmodern writing is a deliberate artistic choice that reflects a departure from fixed endings. Writers in the postmodern era seek to embrace the complexities and uncertainties of life, employing open endings as a means to mirror the ambiguous nature of existence. “We seem to be living a never-ending story, humanity, so why are we so fond of endings?” (Ştefan 1). Over time, the concept of ending “became more intractable by the complication and multiplication of narrative endings through postmodernist narrative techniques” (De Lang. qtd in Abshavi & Taghvaei 138).

One can argue that the multiplicity of ending adapted in postmodern writing is a reflection of the uncertainty of truth, and a skeptical, critical approach to the modern ideals which were characterized by “universalism, absolute truth, and objective reality and the related cultural construction of grand narratives” (Popoveniuc 7). Moreover, one can see it as an attempt to overthrow and challenge the traditional established structure of narration. In addition, it is also a means of allowing the reader to engage with text. Through processing and interpreting the open, unfixed ending, the reader become somehow an active participant in the text, simply through applying his own closure as a conclusion.

The transition from traditional narratives to the multiplicity of endings in video games mirrors the postmodernist approach to storytelling. Just as postmodern writers questioned the concept of absolute truth and addressed the complexities of human existence, game developers followed in this footsteps. Through the implementation of multiple endings and diverse branching paths, the games offer players a wide range of perspectives on the story, prompting them to engage and interpret its elements actively.

American Professor Mark J. P. Wolf maintains that the presence of interactivity in a narrative does not necessarily result in the loss of its coherence and sequential structure. Even when multiple endings are incorporated, they are carefully crafted by the author, who possesses the authority to determine their occurrence, conditions, and the actions that lead to them. (41).

In spite instances where a story offers multiple endings without favoring a particular one or adopts an open-ended structure, these factors alone should not dismiss the work's artistic value. Ambiguity has long been an integral component of artistic expression, exemplified in interactive fiction, also referred to as hypertext fiction. Notable examples of this genre include Michael Joyce's "afternoon, a story" (1990) and Stuart Moulthrop's "Victory Garden" (1992). Despite featuring user interactivity, ambiguity, and multiple endings, these works are widely recognized as literary and artistic creations. Similarly, video games have the capacity to provide comparable experiences, enhanced by the inclusion of audiovisual elements. (41).

The inclusion of multiple endings and open-endedness in storytelling expands the artistic possibilities and challenges traditional notions of narrative structure. It allows for a more nuanced exploration of themes and encourages active participation from the audience or players. By presenting divergent paths and outcomes, these narrative approaches acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations that exist in the real world. This departure from linear narratives reflects the postmodernist rejection of a single,

authoritative truth and embraces the idea that reality is complex, fragmented, and subjective.

“In a playable story there is no winning or losing: the purpose of the player is not to beat the game, but to observe the evolution of the storyworld” (Rayan qtd. in Wolf 71). The quote highlights a fascinating perspective on open endings in video games, emphasizing that the purpose of the player extends beyond simply winning or losing. Instead, it suggests that players engage in a playable story to observe the evolution of the story world.

The purpose is not to conquer challenges or defeat enemies but to witness the awe-inspiring evolution of the story’s world. In “The Stanley Parable,” a narrative-driven video game created and authored by game developers Davey Wreden and William Pugh, players assume the role of Stanley, a character guided by a narrator. The game defies traditional narrative structures, presenting players with numerous diverging paths and alternative endings. The objective is not to reach a specific goal but to explore the boundaries of free will and challenge the authority of the narrator. The open endings prompt players to question their role in the story and the nature of storytelling itself.

Ultimately, Open endings do not aim for a specific victory condition. Instead, they captivate players by immersing them in an explorative journey of the story world. Through observation and interaction, players are compelled to question their conventional beliefs about winning or losing. This invitation leads them to embrace the narrative’s richness and complexity as it unfolds before them.

Transitioning from the exploration of open endings, the focus now shifts to the realm of characterization. Within this context, the objective analysis involves examining the deliberate craftsmanship and techniques employed to develop characters that possess a compelling and authentic nature.

1.8 Characterization

Characterization is a crucial element of storytelling that brings literary works to life by creating complex and multidimensional characters. Through characterization, authors develop characters that evoke emotions, provoke thoughts, and resonate with readers. By carefully crafting a character's personality, motivations, and relationships, writers can create relatable and compelling figures that help explore universal human experiences.

The craft of characterization is an attempt to honor and explore the truth of human nature through the art of storytelling. We see in our characters reflections of ourselves, which is why we detect in their stories, no matter how fanciful or dark or grand, an attempt to better understand our lives. And what else is there to discuss, really, than our lives? (Corbett 18)

The quote highlights the importance of creating well-rounded characters in storytelling to depict the truth of human nature. By connecting with these characters, readers can gain insights into their own lives and foster self-awareness. The quote emphasizes that literature plays a crucial role in initiating discussions about the human experience and can serve as a medium for introspection and understanding.

Aspects of the novel, such as the plot, time, and settings, are essential constituents in bringing a story together. The abstract ideas found in symbolic forms throughout the author's description, in addition to the era in which the tale is set in, do certainly convey a great deal of importance and context, but what makes sense of the story elements are the characters within them that brings everything together and narrow the general to the specific. As Corbett puts it in his book *The Art of Character Creating Memorable Characters for Fiction, Film, and TV* (2013), "In the stories that affect us most profoundly—whether taken from myth, the Bible, Greek tragedy, Renaissance drama, the

novel, postmodern fiction, film, TV—it's the characters that linger most tenaciously in the mind. In some 'subtle, sneaky, important' way, they are us" (18).

It is important to note however, that not every character in fiction will always have that depth and complexity which makes the reader immersed and in a state of profound empathy, some minor characters are mere puppets that exist for the sole purpose of driving the plot in a certain direction. It is indeed, the multidimensional, multilayered characters that exude conflicting desires, vulnerabilities, secrets, frustration, and most importantly contradictions that remind us of ourselves. Such characteristics, which echo life, are often based on intuition rather than intellect. While coated in the mentioned traits, the author's desired emotional messages are transmitted throughout the story in the reader's heart.

1.8.1 Compelling Characters

The question of what makes a character appealing can potentially be based on multiple factors, such as the element of time. Each era has its influential pop culture that plays a role in what is desired or attractive to the consumer; whether it is the chivalrous, noble knight, the cynical detective, or the rebellious maverick teenager (*LibGuide*). The core, fundamental static factor that makes a character appealing, however, is arguably relatability.

Jain, Aakanksha proclaims, "Fictional characters help readers by providing them with an escape from reality. Reading about characters who are going through struggles similar to our own can help us feel less alone. We see the character's growth and journey, and it inspires us to keep going." (*Books Charming*). From this notion, one can argue that as long as an individual can relate, identify and project himself with the character, it does not matter if it is humanoid, robotic, mythical, or else, as emotions, being the universal language they are, allow for a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences. The universality of emotions as a tool for connecting the audience to a

character opens up a new line of inquiry into how characters are represented in postmodernist literature.

1.8.2 Representations of Characters in Postmodernist Literature

As Highlighted by Barry Lewis in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (2001), postmodernist literature aspects, include “temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs; the loose association of ideas; paranoia; and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse.” (123). These postmodern literary aspects that challenge the traditional conventions naturally influence the design of characters, as such, a postmodernist character would, for instance, disregard the typical one-dimensional hero archetypes, found, for example, in earlier detective and fantasy novels, instead, it would be constructed in a complex, and nuance, manner, which reflects the fragmentation and complications of the postmodern world.

A good example of a postmodernist character is Harry Dresden from the popular urban fantasy series *The Dresden Files* written by Jim Butcher. Harry is ironically both a no-nonsense private investigator and a wizard based in Chicago. He is a multi-faceted character with a complex psychological makeup; Dresden is haunted by his traumatic past and struggles with inner demons, making him a deeply flawed and conflicted protagonist. This approach to character development is a breakthrough from the more traditional, one-dimensional protagonist which at times could feel untrue to life. It is arguably him being both flawed and projectable that makes the average reader relates to him.

Harry is not afraid of getting his hands dirty, but he is also a vulnerable and emotionally sensitive individual who is haunted by his past and struggles with his inner demons, which allows the reader perhaps, to see a glimpse of his ordeals in the character and identifies with him. Harry Dresden is a classic hard-boiled detective, but he is also a

wizard who battles supernatural creatures. This mix of genres creates an ironic and self-aware tone that is common in postmodern literature.

Irony and sarcasm are a major part of Harry's personality and it is highlighted throughout the story as that tone is ever present whether be it in a casual or a serious situation. An example of this can be found in the third book of the series *Death Masks*, when Harry told Sanya, a knight of the cross, "So. You get handed a holy sword by an archangel, told to go fight the forces of evil, and you somehow remain an atheist. Is that what you're saying?" (71). Moreover, by incorporating a range of supernatural beings and creatures that can sometimes appear ambiguous, the series challenges the traditional notions of the traditional binaries such as good and evil characters.

1.8.3 The Representation of Postmodernist Characters in Video Games

It is established that elements such as self-reflexivity, breaking the fourth wall, challenging traditional narrative structures, and incorporating metafiction are what constitute the postmodernist character. By applying such measures to the medium of video games one can start to identify many characters from different video game titles as postmodernists. For instance, the character GLaDOS, from the puzzle game *Portal* (2007) developed and published by Valve, is a sentient computer system that controls a testing chamber in which the player character is trapped. GLaDOS's dialogue is characterized by irony, sarcasm, and meta-commentary on the game's mechanics. She also proceeds to break the fourth wall by addressing the play directly in some instances. Up until this point, one can argue that the representation of the character is similar in both mediums. What makes one more postmodern than the other is the ability of the medium in eliminating or limiting the author/narrator by assigning the player as both author and protagonist.

Games such as *Dark Souls*, an action role-playing game developed by Hidetaka Miyazaki from Software. These games are known for their unique gameplay, mechanics,

and challenging difficulty, but what matters is that the player is set in an open world or what is known as *Metrodvania*⁶ where the story is free to be explored and tackled in a nonlinear manner; the player is free to choose whatever direction or path to take without the limitation that can be found in other games, which imposes on the player to follow a specific path or quest in a linear manner.

To better illustrate the representation of characters in video games, let's consider the example of Harry Dresden, a well-known character, and reimagine him as a playable character in the RPG⁷ genre. As mentioned earlier, the character of Dresden is already established by the author, with his personality, traits, abilities, flaws, and strengths already imposed on the reader. While some readers can identify with Dresden, others may feel distant or detached from the character.

However, in the medium of video games, player agency plays a significant role. Players have the ability to choose and control Dresden's lines, decisions, and actions in both casual and consequential instances of the game. These choices and decisions can be accurate representations of Dresden's established personality or completely distinct, offering a range of possibilities. This feature provides an enjoyable experience for both avid franchise readers and casual gamers.

For example, players can customize Dresden's spells, and magical abilities based on their preferred playstyle. By utilizing skill trees⁸, perks, or talent trees commonly found in

⁶ (video games, informal) A style of platform game with role-playing game elements and inventory items, involving more exploration than a traditional linear platform game. (*Glosbe*)

⁷ role-player games

⁸ (Video games) A hierarchal visual representation of customizations a player can make to their character. Skill trees can either branch out or eventually fold back to a single point depending on the game. Typically some form of skill point is used as opposed to spending experience points. (*Your Dictionary*)

video games, players can enhance and focus on specific spells, such as “Forzare” (254), which is the most commonly used spell by Dresden in the story. However, thanks to the game mechanics, players can also choose to prioritize spells like “Ventas Servitas” (309), which may not have been heavily used in the original story. This level of customization adds depth and personalization to the gameplay experience.

In summary, video game characters are designed to appeal to both consumers seeking a more immersive and personal experience within their favorite franchise or novel, as well as casual gamers looking for entertainment outside of their own world. By becoming one with the player character, video games offer an opportunity to engage with beloved characters in a dynamic and interactive way.

Consumer culture is a market-driven material culture that shapes the relationship between consumers and the goods/services they use. It reflects and reproduces values and status, playing a pivotal role in social change. (Miles)

1.9 Consumer Culture and Consumerism in The Twenty-First Century

In this era of mass production, mass media, and globalization, consumerism, or what is known as consumer culture has become a defining feature of the postmodern world. British sociologist Mike Featherston argues that through advertising mass corporations managed to exploit the void or loss of meaning that the postmodern world is witnessing by attaching “images of romance, exotica, desire, beauty, fulfillment, communality, scientific progress and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as soap, washing machines, motor cars, and alcoholic drinks” (14).

The proliferation of signs and images, and their overproduction and reproduction, contributed to the erosion of fixed meaning, as well as to the hyper-aestheticization of reality (Featherston 15). This entails that the various media, being constantly absorbed especially from reality tv shows and social media, can evoke in the average individual a sense of loss and need to peruse or acquire this advertised glamorous and perfect lifestyle which might be a mere mirage. This chase is arguably what led to the postmodern ‘depthless culture’ that Jameson (1984a,1984b) spoke about (15).

One can argue that the “depthless culture” in the postmodern world can be identified through its lack of a fixed identity, “In today’s world, identity is no longer a given, but an open question” (*Bethinking.org.*). This loss in the sense of identity can be seen as a result of the destabilization of traditional sources of identity, such as family, religion, and community, which have become increasingly undermined, in addition, the emergence of new sources of identity, such as consumer culture, media, and technology, has led many to struggle in identifying themselves creating what is arguably an identity crisis.

Whether it is a positive, or a moral matter is debatable but what is a fact, however, is that this identity dilemma has created a market especially for video games corporation and brands to exploit. Recent video games have been attempting to blur the line between the character being played and the player, by offering the latter the ability to create, design, customize, and essentially live the life of the character being played. This combined with the high quality and realistic nature of the contemporary modern games, the player has begun to immerse on a level that is beyond just entertainment; players have started to develop a virtual identity distinct from their own.

To give an example, in the 2013 action-adventure game developed by Rockstar North *Grand Theft Auto V*, and specifically in the online multiplayer segment where players interact with other real-life players instead of NPCS, the game’s community developed servers which are dedicated to role-playing or RP. In these servers, each player gets to

create and customize a character, (that either resembles his actual real-life characteristic, personality, and traits or an aspired idealistic one), wherein they communicate with their voices. Each player then assigns himself a specific role such as a cop, a firefighter, a criminal, a doctor, a priest, a rebel, a hermit. The list is only limited by the creative imagination of the player.

Another example that comes to mind is VRChat. It typically involves the use of a virtual reality headset, which allows users to enter a fully immersive 3D environment where they get to engage in activities such as playing games, watching movies, or simply chatting with each other in a virtual space. Furthermore, the player gets to choose and build his/her character either inside or outside the game by designing and shaping not only humanoid, fantastic, and robotic personas but even objects and abstract ideas that can be personified and embodied. The general characters, however, range from pop culture figures, both realistic and fictional.

What is appealing to most users engaging in the game is that each one can express or construct his/her own identity since the game allows the players to engage their individual creativity within the community through voice chat. Such games have become a haven for individuals struggling to express their identities, or find a footing in the real world thus making them opt for these postmodern hyper realistic games which emphasize French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard's point in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) of the modern world being characterized by the proliferation of signs and images, which have replaced reality with simulations and illusions (1) leading to the dissolution of traditional concepts such as truth, meaning, and identity.

1.9.1 Character and Identity in the Digital Era

The lack of clarity regarding identity, truth, and meaning in the postmodern globalized world has resulted in numerous anomalies in individuals' character and identity.

Formerly, actions or beliefs that diverged from the norm were perceived as abnormal or bizarre. Though it could be argued that in the contemporary time, inclusivity is being encouraged and welcomed, not every individual, culture, or society may be open to unfamiliarity, which can be viewed as a threat, particularly to conservative ideologies, and may result in retaliation. Therefore, people, mostly teenagers, and young adults of the modern era, resort to the virtual reality and simulation as a refuge.

The Sims; a series of life simulation video game developed by Maxis and published by Electronic Arts can be a great example of living in a simulacrum. Released in the year 2000, the game allows players to create and control their virtual characters, known as Sims, and manage their daily lives, relationships, and careers in a virtual environment. What makes the game appealing to the franchise's fans is that they get the chance to create a representation of a player's self or desired self; the character designed can have all the quirks and traits which the individual cannot express in real life. In addition, one can make himself/herself a fictional character such as a vampire, an alien, a witch or a ghost.

The inclusivity the game offer could be summarized in Lyndsay Pearson, executive producer and general manager of *The Sims* claim wherein he asserts "We constantly question each other about how to make our features or designs broader, more inclusive," (*The Washington Post*) in the same article *How The Sims navigated 20 years of change to become one of the most successful franchises ever* written by Elise Favis in *The Washington Post* website. It is stated, "Maxis and EA say they've taken great care in making a welcoming environment for people of different backgrounds and genders". It could be argued that this blend of fiction and reality in addition to inclusivity creates an attractive case of an ideal, fantastic reality to the perplexed player. Building upon the allure of an ideal, fantastic reality in gaming, it is relevant to explore the parallel phenomenon of the popularity of fantasy literature as a source of entertainment in the sphere of the twenty-first century.

1.10 Fantasy Literature as a Source of Entertainment in The Twenty/Twenty-First Century

The genre of fantasy witnessed a major boom in recent modern and postmodern times. Though its definition has been seemingly difficult to pin down major literary theorists in the field such as Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, W. R. Irwin, and Colin Manlove, generally “all agree that fantasy is about the construction of the impossible whereas science fiction, on the other hand, maybe about the unlikely, but is still grounded in the scientifically possible.” (James & Mendlesohn 1). According to Meryem Mengouchi, “The difference between an SF text and a fantasy is related to the presence of the element of science (scientific discovery/experiment), unlike fantasy, in which the alien or different world is due to the supernatural (like the transformation of Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, which is not a result of a scientific experiment or invention)” (22). These critics, however, diverge and begin to create their interpretations of fantasy, which encompass the texts they deem valuable and disregard the majority of what is commonly considered fantasy by the public.

In fantasy of the second half of the twentieth century, after the release of Tolkien’s classic essay, *On Fairy Stories*, scholar, Brian Attebery, proposed “the most valuable theoretical text for taking a definition of fantasy beyond preference and intuition” in his work *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992). He suggests that fantasy literature can be viewed as a group of texts that share common tropes or narrative techniques, he also put forth a sort of spectrum in which works of fantasy located in the center are “stories which share tropes of the completely impossible” while towards the edge “are those stories which include only a small number of tropes, or which construct those tropes in such a way as to leave doubt in the reader’s mind as to whether what they have read is fantastical or not.” (James & Mendlesohn 1).

Accordingly, Attebery describes fantasy as a “fuzzy set” (Casey 113), similarly, the same concept could be attributed to modern and postmodern works of literature regarding the fogginess and blurriness of their boundaries on the maps of criticism (James & Mendlesohn 3). As such, “(Post)modern fantasy then comprises one of the fuzziest of all sets” (Casey 113). This means that there is no clear agreement on what counts as fantasy and what does not.

In the early twentieth century, critics were often dismissive of fantasy literature, viewing it as mere escapism rather than a legitimate form of artistic expression, this resulted in many famous fantasy writers, such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, who developed their work within the milieu of modernism, to not typically be discussed “alongside recognized modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein or Joseph Conrad” (Casey 114), simply because at that time, many critics did not take fantasy literature seriously as a literary genre.

To exemplify, in modern times, it is possible to view Frodo and Samwise as characters who are attempting to navigate a difficult and chaotic world to bring about meaningful change (Casey 114). However, during the time when J.R.R. Tolkien was writing, many people did not see these characters as believable or important. They criticized Tolkien’s works of fantasy, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, as being purely escapist and lacking in real-world relevance (Casey 114). This labeled fantasy as a “low” form of art concerned with “play and desire” (Casey 115) as such, “fantasy is itself postmodern” (Casey 115).

Fantasy literature has become increasingly popular in the twenty-first century. Some of the influential works which contributed to its fame and managed to both captivate, intrigue, and entertain the reader’s mind include the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R.R. Martin, and *The Witcher* by Andrzej Sapkowski.

These respective works have been iconic in the field of literature for so long, yet their popularity in the contemporary time; which is witnessing a decrease and a lack of reading, can be accredited to their digitalized adaptations to the modern forms of media such as television shows, movies, and video games. For instance, the Harry Potter series, it only took four years after the release of the first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997 to be adapted into a movie through Warner Bros who purchased the rights to the film in October 1998.

Another new more postmodern adaptation to the series is arguably the newly released video game *Hogwarts Legacy*, the action role-playing game was developed by Avalanche Software, published by Warner Bros, and released in February 2023. The game is set in the wizarding world of Harry Potter; it takes place in the same universe as the *Harry Potter* books and movies, wherein players get to experience, explore and interact with familiar locations, creatures, and characters of the series.

What distinguishes this experience and makes it unique, however, is that the game allows players to create, and name their character with the ability to choose their appearance, skills, and abilities. In addition, the game lets them decide which of the four classic houses (Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin) they want to join, this decision will affect the character throughout the gameplay and the plot.

The idea behind offering this degree of autonomy is to blur the line between fiction and reality as the player gets to live and be a part of his childhood cast, rather than witnessing the events and the world from a foreign perspective. The player will feel more engaged and attached since he/she is the character being played. Moreover, the game offers the ability to free roam and explore its open world, this means that the player is not restricted and limited solely to the area where the objective is needing to be achieved, instead, the player can explore whatever spot he desires.

Game critic Nick Gillett from *Metro GameCentral* asserts in his review of the game that it is “A true wizard RPG, whose historical setting frees it from the limitations of the books and films, with an open world experience that entertains no matter how much you care about the source material.” (*OpenCritic*).

With the Harry Potter series serving as a prime example of contemporary fantasy literature, it is worth exploring the various subgenres that exist within the larger fantasy genres, one particular subgenre which is frequently associated with adults and not-so-friendly tales is dark fantasy.

The taxonomy of genres is not set in stone, and this is because literature is not static, it is rather constantly evolving and it often corresponds to and reflects the changes which occur in society, culture, and individual creativity (Kaveney 214). Dark fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy fiction that typically include elements of horror, Gothic literature, and sometimes science fiction. Its themes are often sinister, darker in nature, and are categorized by violence, death, evil, and the supernatural. It is a clear contrast to high fantasy, which frequently features epic quests and battles between good and evil. It generally explores darker and more complex themes of morality and the human condition.

Dark fantasy and what could be identified within it; template dark fantasy and paranormal romance were created in the past two decades as a means of categorizing texts that previously did not fit into a clear genre category “or which were not automatically allocated to dark fantasy on their first appearance” (Kaveney 214). Distinguishing between dark fantasy and other related genres such as horror and gothic can be quite fuzzy since they share some common features and elements notably darkness, and horror. In fact, “John Clute in the 1997 *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* was almost skeptical about whether the term ‘dark fantasy’ was useful at all” (Kaveney 214).

Constant arguments are being made that some texts which are classified as one of those genres should be reallocated to dark fantasy and vice versa. Though the distinctions are hard to draw on the surface, the genres can differ in significant ways. To illustrate, horror literature is primarily focused on creating a sense of fear or evoking a feeling of terror in the reader, often through supernatural or paranormal means. Gothic literature, on the other hand, is characterized by an atmosphere of mystery and gloom, frequently featuring ancient, haunted settings and supernatural occurrences. Dark fantasy incorporates elements from both horror and gothic literature, while also delving into complex and morally ambiguous characters and themes, exploring the darker aspects of the human psyche and society. (Kaveny 217)

Kaveny asserts “Perhaps the most crucial distinction to draw, and in essence the hardest, is that between dark fantasy and horror,” (217), he argues that this is due to the two genres sharing many of their key writers in addition to the vocabulary. He attempts to narrow down these broad, challenging similarities through the element of the character, specifically the protagonists. Kaveny maintains that “there is always a sense in dark fantasy of its protagonists being in a jeopardy that is the default setting of horror” (217), yet what could be the divergence point “is that the central aim of horror is to create catharsis by confronting the reader with a world in which the worst thing happens to the characters with whom we identify” (217). This entails that the reader of horror will feel a sense of relief or “catharsis” (217), that he is not living within that dreaded world, in which the story is taking place and is not subjected to the upheavals and gut-wrenching events lived by the protagonist.

According to Georgia State University researchers Cynthia Hoffner, and Kenneth J. Levine, “One explanation for why people enjoy such presentations relies on the conversion of negative affect to euphoria following a satisfying resolution to a threat.” (209). An example of this can be illustrated in the *Silence of the Lambs* novel/movie by Thomas Harris

in 1988, where the protagonist, FBI agent, Clarice Starling, is tasked with tracking down a serial killer who skins his victims. Throughout the narrative, viewers are compelled to face the disturbing and horrifying behavior of the murderer. Nevertheless, toward the end of the movie, the killer is caught and receives punishment, which offers a feeling of emotional release and resolution to the reader.

In the world of video games, however, where the line shared by the character and the consumer is blurred, a sense of indistinguishability arises between the threat facing the virtual protagonist and the player, the player might get too immersed in the game, the recent enhancement in video games hardware and graphics, which in some cases can be mistaken for reality.

A great case in point of this would be the 2017 survival horror game developed and published by Capcom *Resident Evil: Biohazard*. The plot of the game takes place in Louisiana, USA, and centers around Ethan Winters, a man who receives a message from his missing wife, Mia, after three years of her disappearance. Players control Ethan from a first-person perspective, further eliminating the sense of separability between the consumer and the protagonist, this dwindles the sense of safety and relief which usually occurs in the reader of horror.

The game also supports VR which transfers the player to the game's creepy, ominous, and gruesome environment. This makes the players both mentally, and physically engaged throughout the story which can potentially deceive their cognitions into interpreting the virtual, fictional situation as a real threat, leading to the stimulation and activation of the amygdala⁹.

⁹ Amygdala: region of the brain primarily associated with emotional processes. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

The protagonist of dark fantasy, on the other hand, overcomes that “jeopardy to a kind of chastened wisdom” (Kaveney 217). This means that the main character in dark fantasy faces challenges and dangers, but they ultimately emerge from those experiences with a newfound sense of humility and wisdom. An illustration of this case would be from *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by George R.R. Martin where Daenerys Targaryen overcomes a series of challenging trials and emerges with a greater sense of strength and wisdom. Despite being sold into marriage by her own brother, she eventually rises to the position of queen and commands an army to conquer and govern several cities in Essos.

An example of what could be labeled as dark fantasy in video games is the 2015 action role-playing video game developed by Software and published by Sony Computer Entertainment *Bloodborne*. Kaveney’s statement about the protagonist in the dark fantasy genre coming “through that jeopardy to a kind of chastened wisdom” (217) can be applied to *Bloodborne*. In the game, the player character, known as Hunter, encounters various challenges and obstacles, both physical and mental, while on a quest to unravel the truth behind the nightmarish events in Yharnam.

In *Bloodborne*, the player’s gaining of insight leads to a shift in their perception of the world of Yharnam and a deeper understanding of the nightmare and its inhabitants. This knowledge, however, is considered a curse. The Honoring Wishes ending reveals the player character taking on the role of Gehrman, the previous caretaker of the Hunter’s Dream, indicating the perpetuation of a cycle despite their efforts.

The uniqueness of the protagonist in dark fantasy video games lies in the player’s ability to embody and make decisions based on their own analysis, understanding, and

moral compass. The developers intentionally leave the story open to interpretation, allowing the player to engage with the game world and chose the conclusions on their own accord. The Hunter, as a customizable and enigmatic character, acts as a vessel for player immersion, fostering a strong emotional connection and personal experience.

1.11 Conclusion

To fully explore life's abundant possibilities in a single lifetime is impossible. This is why many resorts to venture into the world of reading to gratify their boundless inquisitiveness for the magical *what if*¹⁰. To read is to explore life from another perspective, transcend through time and space, into experiencing events from an outsider's viewpoint as if they are our own. Fictional characters have the ability to make us grieve, celebrate, love, hurt and cry both tears of joy and sadness, as each one of us sees a reflection and a glimpse of ourselves in these characters. Empathy, however, is hard to be achieved, for in order to understand and relate another's feelings and circumstances they must first resonate with the reader's personal emotions and experiences, and that can be quite subjective. This is arguably one of the reasons why in the postmodern era, the shift went from the author to the reader.

Postmodernism sought to eliminate or limit the artist's full authority over the art, while considering the spectator an important aspect in deciphering and interpreting the meaning according to his own biases resulting in the erosion of what was previously defined as a high and low form of art. In literature, the death of the author coincided smoothly with the rise of video games. Videogame's participatory nature serves as a fertile medium for the new postmodern approach, in which the consumer is given a major part in

¹⁰ Italics for emphasis

interfering and engaging with the plot by essentially becoming both the narrator and the protagonist.

Indeed, through many features such as customization, decision-making, and player agency, the player assumes the role of the character. With the lines between fiction and reality blurred, a sense of empathy is hard not to be established between the player and the character. This bond often results in a greater degree of emotional investment in the story, driving the player to see it through to its conclusion and experience a deep sense of fulfillment after sharing the character's struggles, growth, and ultimate triumphs

**Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*:
Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark
Reality, and Game Adaptation**

2.1 Introduction

The Witcher is a dark fantasy series written by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. At the age of 38, Sapkowski submitted his work “Viejmin” (Polish) to a fantasy magazine writing competition, where he achieved third place. Despite this setback, he released the first title of the series, “Sword of Destiny,” in 1992, which was a huge success and became a cultural phenomenon in Poland. The short stories and novels were originally written in Polish, limiting their recognition and popularity to the country. However, in 2007, the Polish video game development studio CD Projekt RED released the first *Witcher* game, catapulting the story to global prominence. In the same year, the translation of the works began, reaching a wider international audience. The series consists of a total of 8 books, and the game adaptations comprise a trilogy: *The Witcher* (2007), *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011), and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015).

In 2019, the series was also adapted into a television series by Netflix. Sapkowski drew inspiration from influential fantasy writers like Tolkien and other notable figures of the twentieth century. However, what set him apart was his departure from traditional fantasy tropes. Instead of emphasizing simplistic notions of good versus evil, his themes delved into morally ambiguous territories. He diverged from classical portrayals of heroes, monsters, and quests, opting for dark and realistic situations that often led to unsettling outcomes. This was presented through a more nuanced and morally complex narrative, often told in a fragmented and nonlinear manner.

The story revolves around Geralt of Rivia, a highly skilled monster hunter known as a Witcher. Through a process of mutation and rigorous training in Witcher schools, Geralt and other Witchers gain supernatural powers, including enhanced senses, speed, and the ability to use Signs (simple forms of magic). These abilities are acquired through the harsh and demanding Trial of the Grasses, which not all young apprentices survive. Those who pass become full-fledged Witchers, venturing into the world to combat monsters and

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

fulfill contracts. Although the story includes elements of fiction and is set in a world of fantasy, Sapkowski's explanation of the world's events and lore is realistic and grounded, leaning toward a rational and dark reality. *The Witcher* series acts as a critique of traditional fantasy tales by presenting a more nuanced and believable world. While fantastical creatures and magic exist, they are depicted in a way that explores the consequences and complexities of their existence. The rich tapestry of characters that populate both the game adaptations and the original novels helps readers and players make sense of the overarching world, themes, and narrative of *The Witcher* series.

2.2 Unveiling the Significance of Characters in *The Witcher* Series

Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* book series is set in a realm where the characters play a crucial role in an intricately woven storytelling. Geralt of Rivia is a character of significant importance within this fantastical universe. Geralt of Rivia, a witcher, enthralls readers with his enigmatic persona and exceptional capabilities. Geralt, a mutated monster hunter, relies on his heightened strength and senses to navigate a hazardous world filled with mythical creatures, political maneuvers, and moral complexities. However, beneath his calm exterior, Geralt is introspective and has a strong sense of justice, making him a compelling and relatable character.

Among Geralt's companions, there is a bard known as Dandelion or Jaskier, who is not only a dear friend but also a highly skilled performer. With his wit, charm, and talent for storytelling, Dandelion adds moments of levity and humor to the series. In fact, he is the narrator of the story. He also serves as a constant companion to Geralt and provides a unique perspective on their shared adventures.

Yennefer, a powerful sorceress, is a complex character driven by her own ambitions and aspirations. The relationship between her and Geralt is characterized by its intensity

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

and turbulence, which adds a great deal of depth and emotional complexity to the story. Yennefer's character in the series undergoes a journey through the complexities of politics and magic, displaying a distinctive blend of intelligence, ambition, and vulnerability.

In Andrzej Sapkowski's "The Witcher" book series, Triss Merigold is portrayed as a skilled sorceress and a constant presence in Geralt of Rivia's life. As one of Geralt's companions, she exhibits unyielding loyalty and serves as a valuable ally throughout their adventures. Triss's compassionate and caring demeanor leads her to get entangled in Geralt's tumultuous struggles and thrilling escapades. Her character brings forth a sense of warmth and understanding, providing a counterbalance to the often harsh and brutal realities of the complex world they inhabit in the books. As with other characters in the series, Triss Merigold plays a significant role in shaping Geralt's journey and adding depth to the overarching narrative.

Ciri, also known as Cirilla of Cintra, is a central character in Andrzej Sapkowski's "The Witcher" book series. As a princess of the fallen kingdom of Cintra, Ciri's story intertwines with Geralt of Rivia's in a profound and meaningful way. Ciri is not only a key figure in the political and royal conflicts within the narrative but also possesses extraordinary powers as a result of her Elder Blood heritage. Her journey is marked by constant danger and challenges as she travels a world plagued by war, magic, and the clash of powerful forces.

Through Geralt's perspective, readers are immersed in a world where the boundaries between good and evil are blurred, destinies are intertwined, and the complexities of human nature are vividly portrayed. Thus, it is important to recognize the significance of characters, particularly Geralt of Rivia, in order to fully appreciate the profound impact of

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Andrzej Sapkowski's exceptional literary work and the enduring allure of "The Witcher" series.

2.2.3 Geralt Of Rivia

Geralt is the main protagonist of the story, the supposed *hero*¹¹ of the story but instead of the usual relief, joy, and celebration, people get at the sight of traditional superheroes, at the approach of the Witcher, women cry from fear, children scream, cats hiss and men tremble. His prominent feature is his white, grayish hair which dubbed him the name "White Wolf" (121). The hair, however, is not grey due to old age alone. Despite being almost a hundred years old, he maintains relatively young looks; a consequence of the Witcher mutagens, which makes their aging slower. He is described as "...not old but his hair was almost entirely white" (Sapkowski 1) — the white hair is rather a result of the extra mutations he was subjected to as a child, since his body adapted to the mutagens extraordinarily well "My hair's been white ever since. Total loss of pigmentation. A side-effect, as they say" (61).

Another more symbolic interpretation of his hair, however, could be tied to his moral ambiguity. Geralt often proclaims his disdain towards making choices or taking sides throughout the story, because to him the criterion of good and evil is far more nuanced and delicate, and so to avoid this dilemma he opts to stay in a grey line. One quote which highlights this aspect of his personality can be found in *The Last Wish* wherein amidst a conversation with the sorcerer Stregobor; after he asked him to kill a princess which was supposedly "cursed" according to the magician, this decision is the "lesser evil" (48). Geralt replied asserting "'Evil is evil, Stregobor... 'Lesser, greater, middling, it's all the same.

¹¹ Italics for emphasis

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Proportions are negotiated, boundaries blurred. I'm not a pious hermit, I haven't done only good in my life. But if I'm to choose between one evil and another, then I prefer not to choose at all." (48).

When circumstances reached a critical point, however, and he had to choose between either standing by and letting the princess Renfri whom the Stregobor wanted to kill, came to Blaviken seeking vengeance for the tribulations he had caused her throughout her life, or saving the lives of the innocent people that would die at her hands for this is how she planned to lure out the sorcerer from his tower that lays at the heart of the city, Geralt chooses the latter. The Witcher ended up brutally dismembering the gang, serving and aiding Renfri in her task. The end of his macabre spectacle was with the death of the princess herself, but only after she revealed to him that she had already spoken to the magician who assured her that he would not get out of his tower even if she butchers the entire town thus rendering his actions pointless.

Though the Witcher's intention was to save the townspeople from their perspective, all they witnessed was a bloodied white haired mutant witcher mercilessly and brutally murder a bunch of people in broad daylight. This heroic act which Geralt deemed to be "the lesser evil" (62), resulted in the crowd throwing stones at him instead of flowers. Geralt, however, stands emotionless as if to accept the judgment and not retaliate, only casting a defensive sign around himself and enduring his retribution. Even the alderman who was hospitable and friendly casted the monstrous Witcher out of the town. With a mild wound and a nickname (the butcher of Blaviken) forever attached to his name as a heroic trophy Geralt depart the town to never come back again (60)."

Corbett explores this idea of choices by stating "Sometimes a character faces an inescapable choice between two options that conflict so utterly he's stuck. This usually takes the form of a decision between a moral compromise he finds unacceptable or death"

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

(60). To Sapkowski, however, the moral of the story arguably is when choosing between one evil or another, whether it be lesser or otherwise, it is better not to choose at all, for if Geralt had walked away that day, no bloodshed would have occurred at all. In the same book, and in another short story “THE VOICE OF REASON 4” (60), while confessing his deepest regrets to the silent priests Iola whom he finds great comfort in, arguably for her inability to judge him, Geralt demonstrates the guilt and uncertainty of his choice in Blaviken by saying

There have been situations where it seemed there wasn't any room for doubt. When I should say to myself “What do I care? It's nothing to do with me, I'm a witcher.” When I should listen to the voice of reason. To listen to my instinct, even if it's fear, if not to what my experience dictates. ‘I should have listened to the voice of reason that time . . . ‘I didn't. ‘I thought I was choosing the lesser evil. I chose the lesser evil. Lesser evil! I'm Geralt! Witcher . . . I'm the Butcher of Blaviken

It was experiences like these that made Geralt refuse to side with one faction over the other and prefer to remain neutral most of the time regarding the various conflicts and wars taking place across the Continent. This is primarily due to the “code” that forbids Witchers from intervening in matters outside of their profession, but also because of his nuanced moral compass, which he developed over time.

For being near a century old, Geralt witnessed a fair number of wars and their tragic aftermath. In the novel *Blood of Elves*, the sorcerer Triss Merigold, Geralt's friend, while visiting him at the witchers' keep, Kaer Morhen, where she was invited at his request to aid in assisting his newly adopted girl Cirilla with her new emerging magical abilities. While discussing the ongoing war between the northern kingdoms and the southern Nilfgaard empire which is expanding its dominion by marching northwards, Triss criticizes Geralt and his fellow Witcher brethren for their neutrality and refrain from participating in

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

the war which she was a part of. The witchers were talking about how the war leaves deserted villages and corps that attracts monsters which will result in the need for more job opportunities for witchers. She interrupts Vesemir, the foster father of the group, by asserting that "...they defend these children," she interrupted crossly. "Yes, I know. From the werewolf who might kill two or three a year, while a Nilfgaardian foray can kill and burn an entire settlement in an hour" (92). She further explains that the reason she decided to take part in the war is because she is "fighting the cause, not the effect".

Triss goes on to address Geralt personally for not wanting to play a role in the war. For she knows that he differs from his mates in a sense that he is the most humane of the bunch. The white-haired witcher counters her claim by stating:

I'm not gallant enough. Nor valiant enough. I'm not suited to be a soldier or a hero. And having an acute fear of pain, mutilation and death is not the only reason. You can't stop a soldier from being frightened but you can give him motivation to help him overcome that fear. I have no such motivation. I can't have. I'm a witcher: an artificially created mutant. I kill monsters for money. I defend children when their parents pay me to. If Nilfgaardian parents pay me, I'll defend Nilfgaardian children. And even if the world lies in ruin – which does not seem likely to me – I'll carry on killing monsters in the ruins of this world until some monster kills me. That is my fate, my reason, my life and my attitude to the world. And it is not what I chose. It was chosen for me. (Sapkowski 90)

His cynicism and cold demeanor mislead many who encounter Geralt into labeling him as a heartless monster. However, it is important to note that this facade is not intentionally crafted as Geralt himself believes that he is nothing more than an artificially created mutant (90).

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

When a shapeshifting Doppler morphed into Geralt and he was standing face to face with a picture-perfect replica of himself, the reader gets a brief insight of how the Witcher perceive himself, “What a hideous smile I have, Geralt thought, reaching for his sword. What a hideous face I have. And how hideously I squint. So is that what I look like? Damn.” (157). Exhibiting such inner thoughts reflects his self-loathing and insecurity which is a direct result of his challenging upbringing, intense training, social outcast, constant danger, emotional turmoil, ethical dilemmas, loneliness, post-war hardships that he attempts to hide behind his stoicism. This belief of him being the emotionless killing machine could not be further from the truth. The Doppler which took his form can also see inside his target’s personality confronted the Witcher who was adamant that he cannot be him for the Doppler can only mimic good in people; something which Geralt claims he does not possess. The Doppler agreed that he did see inside his thoughts, but it was different than what Geralt proclaimed, “I, Geralt, knew your thoughts for a moment. Including the ones you don’t want to admit to, the ones you even hide from yourself. Because to stop me you’d have to kill me. And the thought of killing me in cold blood fills you with disgust. Doesn’t it?” (159). The Doppler’s confrontation revealed a stark contrast between Geralt’s self-perception and the hidden depths of his thoughts.

In a conversation with his newly adopted disciple Ciri, who refused to maintain a neutral stance and fight the Elven rebels known as the “Scoia’tael” for she only knew one side of the story. Geralt decided to scold her about neutrality in regard to the ongoing skirmish between the elves and the humans in the ruins of a palace called Shaerrawedd. Geralt, with his profound wisdom and knowledge, explains that there is more than meets the eye; he explains to her how humans were originally the aggressors that sought to massacre the elves, who initially took to the mountains and decided to outlive the humans—until an elven woman named Elirena decided to fight back by forming a league of young dwarves and elves whom she promised glory and marched with them into a desperate coup

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

where they were “Mercilessly massacred” despite the warnings of her elders (133). Geralt assured her that the young elves got what they were promised. “Just as she promised them, they died with dignity, heroically and honourably. They saved their honour but they brought nothing but ruin as a result, condemned their own race to annihilation.” (136). He finally asserted that “To be neutral does not mean to be indifferent or insensitive. You don’t have to kill your feelings. It’s enough to kill hatred within yourself” (134). This gives insight to how often things may appear black or white, to Geralt, however, there is always a morally complex and ambiguous grey area, and as such, diving head first into a situation just because it sounds heroic, virtuous and righteous is not always the sensible thing to do, this can be interpreted by the readers as Sapkowski’s direct criticism of the traditional binary heroes.

Geralt was not an inherently stoic person. In fact, his character developed at the beginning of his first journey as a young Witcher. The young prodigy very much desired to be Nobel and knightly. In fact, up until queen Meve officially knighted him as Sir Geralt of Rivia for his aid in the battle of the bridge in Rivia. That famous name which he was always known for was entirely made up to sound more noble as he told his vampire friend Regies in the fourth novel *Baptism of Fire* “I call myself that to make my name sound fancier” (Sapkowski 290). That is, until his knightly ambition clashed with the harsh dark reality of the world.

While recounting about his life and encounters to Iola, a priestess who took a vow to remain silent in the temple of Melitele, Geralt mentioned his excitement as he embarked on his first quest, wherein he was full of “conviction, enthusiasm, incentive and . . . faith. Faith that [he] was needed in a world full of monsters and beasts, to protect the innocent” (61). His faith was short-lived and shattered however, after meeting his first monster in the highway which was ironically a human being; “bald and had exceptionally rotten teeth”. The bald man along with his “fellow monsters” were in the process of seizing a peasant’s

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

cart containing a father and his thirteen years old daughter. As the father was held by the bald man's companions, he tore off the little girl's dress in an attempt to rape her while shouting that "it was time for her to meet a real man". Despite being warned numerous times not to get involved in such incidents, Geralt stood up to him bravely as any other hero would do in that instant and dealt him "spectacular" cuts which left him gruesomely wounded causing his gang to flee at such a sight.

Geralt assumed that his heroic act would result in "the girl, sobbing with gratitude, to kiss her saviour on the hands, and her father to thank [him] on his knees" (62). In reality, however, "her father fled with his attackers, and the girl, drenched in the bald man's blood, threw up, became hysterical and fainted in fear when [he] approached her" (62). This encounter was a crushing blow to Geralt's faith and was the begging of his self-restraint and refrain from interfering in matters outside of his profession making it the sole purpose arguably as a mask to overshadow his initial ambitions, this notion is highlighted by Corbett who asserts that "Our desires may be layered or nested, with one used to veil another we secretly want more but are too shy, too remiss, too riddled with doubt or scarred by previous failure to pursue." (56).

As anti-climactic and disappointing his experience is, it is something people frequently deal with. Many run to a goal with idealistic hopes and expectations only for it to wither away at the face of reality. This approach to heroism resonates with the modern realistic reader that no longer saw the world from an idealistic lens. In addition to not interfering. Despite his intention or motives, The Witcher got accustomed to be viewed as a freak of nature by the regular folk "If they spat, cursed and threw stones I rode away. If someone came out to give me a commission, I'd carry it out." (62). To be different is to be unwelcomed most of the time; a notion that perhaps is not only applicable in the world of *The Witcher* but one which transcend to the real world. In spite of the discrimination and prejudice Geralt encountered throughout his life, he maintains his composure, and acts in

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

a courteous and respectful attitude, this combined with his principles which are characterized by integrity and honesty, gains him respect with his contractors, acquaintances and friends.

Geralt's character in this regard does what is necessary for survival even if it meant suppressing his rational meticulous, and calculated approach to life is what ensured his long longevity as one of the fewer Witchers to roam the continent. This aspect of his character was depicted in the fifth story "The Edge of the World" from *The Last Wish* wherein Geralt and his troubadour friend Dandelion were captured by a group of Seidhe Elves whilst chasing a creature called the devil; a humanoid creature with a goat-like appearance known as the Sylvan. The elves were persecuted by humans and run to the mountains of the edge of the world, where they are starving and dying.

The Seidhe, specifically their leader Filavandrel hold clear contempt and prejudice for humans "It is you humans who hate anything that differs from you, be it only by the shape of its ears," (105), and hold them accountable for the changes which are occurring in the world. They blame them for cultivating the land, the elf establishes a sense of superiority between the elves and humans; despite being on the brink of annihilation Filavandrel maintains strong vanity and refusal to co-exist with humans to which he prefers "lice" over. The character of Filavandrel can arguably be a representation of the leaders of marginalized groups who rather die than overcome their pride; despite the lives of their people being on the line. Geralt on the other hand, shows a more rational and realistic approach to life. Though the Witcher has a sense of pride of his own, he advocates for assimilation for the sake of survival despite he attempts to reason with the adamant Seidh elf by asserting that "By refusing to cohabit you're condemning yourselves to annihilation. To cohabit, to come to an understanding, that's your only chance" (105). Being a subject to discrimination and marginalization himself, the elf points out this fact to Geralt by asking

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

him “How do you find cohabiting with neighbours from whom, after all, you do differ somewhat?” (105), in an attempt to sway his opinion.

The attempts are futile however, as Geralt’s strong conviction is unfaltering “I manage.’ The witcher looked him straight in the eyes. ‘I manage because I have to. Because I’ve no other way out. Because I’ve overcome the vanity and pride of being different. I’ve understood that they are a pitiful defence against being different. Because I’ve understood that... We’ve got to accept facts, elf. That’s what we’ve got to learn” (105). Avid fantasy readers might find such stand as weak. However, it is essential to recognize that not all heroes need to possess unwavering traits to be compelling or realistic. Characters with their own flaws, doubts, and moments of vulnerability can offer a different perspective on heroism and allow for more nuanced and relatable storytelling.

During an interview conducted by Host Sean Evans from Hot Ones, American actor, director, and producer Bryan Cranston stated that “When a character easily cries, the audience doesn’t have to. But if a character tries not to cry, that’s when the audience will.” (Timestamp: 8:01-8:51 *First We Feast*). Strong, stoic and cold characters such as Geralt of Rivia who show little emotion throughout the story, evoke a similar intrigue from the audience. Their restrained nature and the underlying reasons behind their emotional detachment become a source of fascination, enticing viewers to seek glimpses of vulnerability beneath their seemingly impenetrable facade. Witchers are said to be bereft from emotions as the process of mutations in the trial of the Grasses is meant to terminate them. This belief is widely held by the inhabitants of the continent. Geralt is constantly reminded of this supposed deprivation. Istredd in a conversation with Geralt regarding their love triangle with Yennefer brought to his attention this supposed fact “For you are a Witcher and you cannot experience any emotions.” (99). This claim however, could not be further from the truth. Whilst his trials and mutations may have suppressed some of his emotional responses, Geralt’s experiences and interactions reveal a depth of humanity that

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

surpasses the prejudices of those around him which perceive him as a monster, an outsider, someone incapable of feeling compassion or empathy.

Geralt proves his innocence again when lifting a curse from King Foltest's daughter who was turned into a Striga. Unlike others before him who chose the easy way out and conspired to just kill her instead, Geralt risked his life by approaching. She slashed his throat wide open and nearly killed him. Moreover, Geralt forms deep connections with several characters throughout his adventures. He forges friendships with the likes of Dandelion, Yennefer, Ciri, and his love for them is palpable. Geralt's loyalty and devotion to his loved ones are unwavering, as he is willing to go to great lengths to ensure their safety. Despite demonstrating a wide range of emotions, such as anger, sorrow, love, and more, the continuous reminders from people and gaslighting have taken a toll on him. This has led him to believe that he is incapable and devoid of feelings, resulting in feelings of shame. Corbett, in his work, maintains that "The shame creates in us a sense of unworthiness, as though we don't deserve the honest affection of others" (81).

This belief is evident in Geralt's already turbulent romantic relationship with the Sorcerer Yennefer. During a conversation where she urged him to express his love, Geralt sadly smiled and replied, 'You don't know?' he smiled sadly. 'My answer would just be a word. A word that doesn't express a feeling, doesn't express an emotion because I'm bereft of them. A word which would be nothing but the sound made when you strike a cold, empty skull" (104). Geralt remains firmly entrenched in his beliefs, impervious to the attempts of others to persuade or reason with him.

One such instance occurred when one of his love interests, the trobairitz Essi Daven, also known as Little Eye, attempted to see beyond Geralt's cold and emotionless exterior. Her scrutiny revealed a glimpse of his true nature after the two were visited by Duke Agloval, who hired Geralt to uncover the mystery of missing pearl divers. These divers were

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

rumored to have been killed due to the duke's romantic relationship with a mermaid, which prompted the need for an interpreter due to the language barrier.

Reluctantly agreeing to the task after learning about the threat to women and children, Geralt found himself confronted by Essi after the departure of the duke. She remarked, 'It's easy to make you take a risk,' she said. 'All it takes is a few words about women and children. And so much is said about how unfeeling you witchers are' (194). She further claimed that the duke was merely manipulating him, not truly caring about women, children, or the elderly. According to her, the duke's primary concern was restarting pearl fishing to avoid financial losses. Geralt tried to dismiss this as a matter of trade, but Little Eye firmly believed that if he were truly heartless, he would have demanded a higher fee.

Geralt remained convinced of his nature, maintaining that he was indeed "an unfeeling witcher and a heartless professional. I risk my life, not other people's" (194). Essi, in her attempt to reach and persuade him, provided a profound analysis of Geralt's character, stating, 'You're sensitive, deep in your angst-filled soul. Your stony face and cold voice don't deceive me. You are sensitive, and your sensitivity makes you fear that whatever you face with a sword in hand may have its own arguments, may have the moral advantage over you...' (194).

Despite Essi's efforts, Geralt appeared too engrossed in his own introspection, as showcased in his response: "Don't try to make me the subject of a moving ballad, a ballad about a witcher with inner conflicts. Perhaps I'd like it to be the case, but it isn't. My moral dilemmas are resolved for me by my code and education, by my training" (196). Through this depiction, the author highlights how wounds inflicted by monsters heal, while the impact of words and discrimination from people cuts far deeper, prompting readers to question who the true monsters are in the story.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Another major part of the story is destiny. Many of the characters explore the theme of grappling with destiny and how far efficacious their actions are in standing against it. Geralt, being the skeptic empiricist protagonist he is, often shrugs off the element of destiny and faith in shaping one's life decisions and outcome. Instead, Geralt adapts a more reasonable or even arguably scientific approach in making sense of the world around him without being disrespectful to others' beliefs. This particular point is highlighted with his conversation with silent priests Iola¹².

While speaking about the source of iron for his sword, which is a meteorite. In the process of describing what a meteorite is, Geralt states that "It's a falling star. You must have seen them - short, luminous streaks in the night. You've probably made a wish on one. Perhaps it was one more reason for you to believe in the gods For me, a meteorite is nothing more than a bit of metal, primed by the sun and its fall, metal to make swords." (61). This statement highlights both the Witcher's respect for Iola's belief while simultaneously demonstrates his view in superstitions. This disbelief has left a sense of pessimism within Geralt, which is evident throughout the story.

Pessimism extends to Geralt's perception of destiny. Although he acknowledges the myths and the power, which destiny holds, the white-haired Witcher is highly skeptical of it. He demonstrated this awareness to Urcheon of Erlenwald, a knight cursed into a hog-like humanoid creature. This encounter took place during Queen Calanthe's royal event, where Geralt was hired to ensure the safety process for her daughter, Princess Pavetta, who was choosing a potential suitor. Urcheon's curse could only be lifted if he was loved as a

¹² Geralt's engagement with the priestess Iola, despite her vow of silence, suggests his yearning for a compassionate and non-judgmental confidant. It reveals his need for a safe haven to express his innermost thoughts and emotions freely, without the expectation of immediate feedback or guidance.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

beast, which is why he invoked the law of surprise ¹³upon Calanthe's husband, King Roegner, after saving his life. This act bound the destiny of his daughter, Pavetta, to Urcheon.

While Geralt emphasizes that destiny alone is insufficient and that "something more" (314) is required, his hesitation and uncertainty on this matter become evident throughout the story, despite his outward projection. After assisting in lifting the curse, Geralt himself applied the law of surprise on Duny (Urcheon), who insisted on rewarding the Witcher for helping him break the curse and win the hand of the queen's daughter.

'Duny,' said Geralt seriously, 'Calanthe, Pavetta. And you, righteous knight Tuirseach, future king of Cintra. In order to become a witcher, you have to be born in the shadow of destiny, and very few are born like that. That's why there are so few of us. We're growing old, dying, without anyone to pass our knowledge, our gifts, on to. We lack successors. And this world is full of Evil which waits for the day none of us are left.'

'Geralt,' whispered Calanthe.

'Yes, you're not wrong, queen. Duny! You will give me that which you already have but do not know. I'll return to Cintra in six years to see if destiny has been kind to me.' not know. I'll return to Cintra in six years to see if destiny has been kind to me. (76)

To everyone's dismay, immediately after evoking the law of surprise, it was revealed that Pavetta is pregnant, thus paving the way for Geralt's new link with his prophesied child

¹³ The Law of Surprise is an ancient tradition that dates back to the dawn of human civilization. According to this custom, when someone's life is saved by another person, they are obligated to offer a favor of unknown nature to their savior. Typically, this favor entails the saved person giving their savior their firstborn child, whether conceived or born without the father's prior knowledge.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

of destiny, Cirella, daughter of Pavetta, to whom he will become both a mentor and a foster father. It is important to note that Witchers become sterilized after going through the process of mutation. Nevertheless, Geralt shrugs off this newfound destiny and refuses to adopt the young girl after the death of her parents. Sapkowski cleverly lays down Geralt's struggle with destiny in the form of fragmented dialogues throughout the course of the separate short stories found in both "The Last Wish" and "Sword of Destiny."

In the short story "The Voice of Reason", the Witcher states, "I believe in the sword" (61). Later, in another story from the same book titled "A Question of Price", during a conversation with Queen Calanthe, he comments on her hiding his sword behind her throne, saying, "...you do realize that a sword alone will not defeat destiny?" (71). These quotes, although taken from two different and separate stories, create an impression that the author is making Geralt contradict himself and his own beliefs.

To further prove this point, Calanthe, in the same story, highlights the role Geralt played in saving her soon-to-be son-in-law, stating, "Rainfam's dagger could have changed destiny. And Rainfam was stopped by a sword held by a witcher." This statement transitions to the next book, "Sword of Destiny," where Geralt has a hallucination of a prophesied-like vision of Queen Calanthe, all bloodied with pierced armor, after drinking enchanted water. She tells him, "The sword of destiny has two blades. You are one of them" (272).

Despite those around him urging him not to abandon his supposed child of destiny, Geralt refuses to adopt Ciri, mainly because she was predestined to him by some meaningless law. Moreover, he is not willing to subject Ciri to the risky life of a Witcher, despite her attachment to him after their bond formed when he rescued her from Brokilon forest. Geralt still abandons her. Later, his poet friend Dandelion reveals to him that a war has ensued in Cirella's hometown, Cintra, and that none survived the massacre, including

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Ciri and her grandmother, Calanthe, whom Geralt inquires about. Sapkowski does not betray Geralt's stoic character as he says nothing in response to Dandelion's information. Instead, he provides a symbolic introspection of Geralt's emotions through nature, specifically autumn. "The wind blew from the river, rippled the water, shook the trees, and the leaves fell from the branches in a shimmering shower. Autumn, thought the Witcher, it's autumn again" (339). Just as the wind shocks the mighty tree trunk, the heavy news shocks the Witcher's tough character. And just as the leaves fall from the branches, internal tears might have dropped from the stoic monster hunter.

This realization of loss makes Geralt realize that it was not merely destiny that tied him to Ciri, but that he had genuinely developed a bond and liking for the little girl. This is evident when he finds her again by chance after evoking the law of surprise for the second time on a merchant whom he had saved from ghouls. The merchant is not sure if he would find anything unexpected in his home, so he suggests giving the Witcher one of his two boys. Upon their arrival at the merchant's house, his wife brings him the news of taking in a lass from the druids who rescue children after wars. Without a second of hesitation, Geralt runs to Ciri and holds her in an embrace. When she asks him if she is his destiny, he replies, "You're more than that, Ciri. Much more" (342). Geralt's acceptance of Ciri as the daughter he might have never had, rather than a mere destiny, becomes a testament to the power of love, choice, and the transformative nature of genuine connections. It signifies a bond that surpasses predetermined roles, allowing them to navigate their intertwined paths with a newfound sense of purpose, strength, and love.

David Corbett in his book *The Art of Character Creating Memorable Characters for Fiction, Film, and TV* states that "By giving the character a deep-seated need or want, you automatically put her at odds with something or someone, for the world is not designed to gratify our desires." (55). This new found need for Geralt is his desire to protect and be a father figure for Ciriella, yet the "odds" that are facing him to achieve his desire is the

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

entire world, for everyone is seeking his foster daughter either for political reasons as she is the legitimate heir to the land of Cintra or for her magical gifts and her possession of the elder blood. Corbett expands on that idea asserting that

a profound, unquenchable longing almost always forces us to do things we normally would never imagine ourselves doing—even things seemingly contradictory to our natures... When confronted with overwhelming obstacles of a kind we've never faced before in pursuit of something we cannot live without, we are forced to change, to adapt, to dig deeper into ourselves for some insight, passion, or strength that will give us the power we need to keep going (Corbett 55).

This is evident in the case of Geralt, for after he was separated from Ciri, *The Witcher*, time and time again break his neutrality, beliefs, and moral compass in order to be reunited with her.

The narrative includes a love story that encompasses the theme of destiny and fate. It revolves around the complex relationship of Geralt of Rivia and Yennefer of Vengerberg. Their first encounter occurs in the last short story, "The Last Wish" from the book *The Last Wish*. After Dandelion's throat was fastened by a genie, who, along with Geralt, found in a sealed jar while fishing. The genie is said to give three magical wishes to the person who removes the seal, hence the name of the story. Geralt carries Dandelion, looking for a sorcerer who can lift the curse off of him. The two were directed by guards to Yennefer who was described as more or less an individualist who disregards, boycotts, and local authorities for her self-interest (118).

After they met, she agreed to help, which was uncharacteristic of her. Geralt learned while conversing with her that she cast a spell which crippled his movements and used hypnosis magic on him to run errands for her that involved beating some of the townsmen who were ruining her image. After waking up from his enchantment, it was revealed to

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Geralt that he had been used by the sorcerer, but she did in fact cure Dandelion, whom she thought had the three wishes, and as such she commanded him after opening a portal to shout “My wish is for you to believe the witcher is not guilty for what occurred. That, and no other, is my wish.” (135).

The wish had no effect because the twist of the story was that the seal of the genie was lifted by Geralt and the Dandelion and thus the wishes were under his name. This information was unknown to Yennefer, who thought that the genie fulfilled all the wishes and now she can capture it to grant her one and only desire; to cure her infertility, which was a result of her becoming a sorcerer. Seeing good in her for helping his friend and attempting to clear his name through the wish, Geralt ran to save her, regardless of the fact that she used him.

To stop the genie’s wrath which was about to kill them, the Witcher used his last wish cleverly so as the genie would not take revenge upon the sorcerer for attempting to bind him, the Witcher uttered a wish which was not specified in the story but later on hinted that he wished for their fate to be intertwined together, “Your wish,” she whispered, her lips very near his ear. ‘I don’t know whether such a wish can ever be fulfilled. I don’t know whether there’s such a Force in Nature that could fulfil such a wish. But if there is, then you’ve condemned yourself to me.” (143). Their relationship begun soon thereafter where the couple resided in Vengerberg for a year where it was relatively a steady one. That is until Geralt couldn’t handle it and left without alarming her. He later on revealed the reason for his departure to Nenneke the priestess and head of Melitele temple by stating that “‘She was too possessive,’ he muttered, turning away his face. ‘I couldn’t stand it. She treated me like—” (112).

The sentence was interrupted by Nenneke , but it could be interpreted as either she treated him as an object displaying possessive behavior, and wanting to assert her

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

ownership or control over his actions and decisions, or as a husband or lover something Geralt might not believe he is fit for or capable of or simply not destined to be, this can be strengthened by the fact that he also ran away from Ciri at first for he did not see himself meant to be a father figure, but simply as an emotionless mutant. In an interview with Daniele Cutali, Andrzej Sapkowski, answered a question concerning the character of Yennefer by stating that as an avid fantasy reader he was disgusted by the idea that the hero could get any woman he desired simply for being the protagonist. He went on to say that “Creating the character of Yennefer I wanted Geralt to be fully grown – but I decided to complicate things a little. I created a woman character who simply refuses to be a fantasy cliché. And all that to please the reader.” (*Sugarpulp*). This statement does not imply that Geralt’s character did not grow from his love and relationship, it simply means that Yennefer’s presence and relationship with Geralt bring additional challenges and conflicts to his growth journey.

This was implemented by making her possess her own unique personality, motivations, and agency, which often clashes with Geralt’s own desires, wants, and needs, creating a more dynamic, lifelike relationship that many readers might identify with. Such elements include passion, conflict, sacrifice, and growth, which characterize genuine connections between individuals.

The element of love is not a resolution that gives closure to a story after the prince or princess overcomes their ordeals and lives happily ever after. It is multifaceted and complex. Geralt, a witcher, and Yennefer, a powerful sorceress, are “made for each other” (74) and bonded by destiny and fate. Yet, ironically, the same fate deprived them of the one thing they both desire: a child of their own.

In a conversation with Geralt, Yennefer tells him that “We two, destined for each other. Created for each other. Pity. The one or ones who created us for each other ought to have made more of an effort. Destiny alone is insufficient, it’s too little. Something more

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

is needed” (Sword of Destiny 303). This “something more” is arguably the child destined for them, Ciriella. Immediately after telling him this, she urges him to ride to Cintra, Ciri’s residence, and not to give up. Only after the trials, tribulations, hardships, and sacrifices they face in their relationship and the search for Ciri does their relationship solidify. Geralt’s last wish is fulfilled, though tragically they both die side by side.

Despite the relationship having realistic tropes, it does not take away from the story’s elements of fantasy. Instead, the blending of the two achieves a more relatable and immersive story for the readers, taking them on a fantastical journey while simultaneously resonating with the realistic part of their lives.

The death of the Witcher, Geralt of Rivia, symbolically occurs in the town of Rivia. In the fifth and last canon book of the story, “The Lady of the Lake,” after going to the edge of the world and back to find his adopted daughter Ciri, Geralt finally reunites with her at Stygga Castle along with Yennefer. A bloody battle ensues between the Witcher and his crew and Vilgafortz and his mercenaries. After their victory, Geralt, Yennefer, and Ciri share an intimate, family-like moment that showcases Geralt’s character growth. For the first time in the series, he freely admits and demonstrates his love for both his daughter and wife, after a prolonged internal conflict of refusing to be emotional and capable of love.

Their reunion, however, always seems to be short-lived. The Emperor of Nilfgaard himself, Emhyr Var Emreis, storms the castle and is revealed to be Duny, the same man whom Geralt lifted the curse from and the legitimate father of Ciri. Emhyr explains his plan to the Witcher, involving an incestuous relationship with his daughter to bear him an heir and fulfill a prophecy he has been told. He orders Geralt and Yennefer to kill themselves with honor in a bath, as an old tradition suggests, so he can take his daughter back home.

With no other option, the couple reluctantly obeys. However, shortly thereafter, Ciri knocks on the door and reveals that Emhyr has left with his men. He had a change of heart due to

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

disgust and introspection. The three of them spend a couple of days together before deciding to split and meet again in Rivia after six days.

On the anticipated day of their meeting, Geralt and his friends Zoltan Chivay, Dandelion, and Yarpem Zigrin are dining, conversing, and waiting for Yennefer and Ciri to arrive. During their drunken conversation, Geralt announces his retirement. He no longer wishes to risk his life defending others, as the world has changed, and evil has become more systematic and organized, hiding behind peace treaties (481). This can be interpreted as a critique of the moral ambiguity and manipulative nature of those in power who use legal frameworks to carry out nefarious deeds. It highlights the idea that evil can exist within the system, taking advantage of the rules and treaties meant to establish peace and order.

Geralt's retirement is also motivated by his love for Ciri and Yennefer. He has finally found something that makes his life worth living. "I've come to the conclusion it would be foolish to risk it in someone else's defense" (483). This is further supported by a reference to the book "Sword of Destiny," where Geralt meets the personification of death at Sodden's Hill. At that time, he believed Ciriella had died in the Battle of Cintra, and Yennefer had died in the Battle of Sodden Hill. He was afraid to look behind him, afraid of seeing death following him. But now, facing death, he no longer feels fear. Death has already taken everything from him, namely Yennefer and Ciri, who give his life meaning and the desire to live (329).

Back at the inn, after Geralt announces his retirement, he gives his sword, Sihil, to Zoltan Chivay. The dwarf refuses to take back the gift and offers it to the innkeeper to hang. A conflict erupts between dwarves, humans, and elves, resulting in a massacre. The reason for the conflict is later debated among scholars, but the main reason is attributed to the local people's ignorance, xenophobia, callous boorishness, and thorough brutishness (486).

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Sapkowski portrays how the blunt and simple rational side of the story is seen as dull when it lacks drama.

Despite renouncing his sword, Geralt is shaken out of his resolve by the brutal murders happening outside. He decides to take Sihil one last time (488). This marks the last time Geralt holds a sword. He moves through the crowd, intending only to wound rather than kill (488). However, his final blow comes from a young man he spared earlier, who stabs him with a pitchfork. Unable to evade the fatal blow, Geralt is left bleeding out. His final thought is a cry to his friends, who rush to his aid but are unable to save him (489). Geralt is aware that his actions are futile in the face of evil. He understands that nothing can truly stop the ever-changing and adapting evil of the world. He doesn't want his loved ones to face the same fate, which is why he urges them to seek shelter.

Yennefer, Ciri, and Triss arrive shortly after to restore peace to the city. However, it is too late for Geralt. Yennefer sits beside him, casting healing spells in a futile attempt to revive him. She drains her life away and dies beside him, as their friends and daughter watch. Geralt, the cursed mutant who was once incapable of emotions, lies in a puddle of his own blood. His last wish is fulfilled, as his fate was indeed intertwined with Yennefer's. Although slightly different from the wish of Aladdin and Jasmine, Geralt's wish is fulfilled nonetheless.

Andrzej Sapkowski adeptly employs the technique of pastiche in his literary works, drawing inspiration from various mythologies, folklore, and literary traditions. The death of Geralt serves as a compelling example of this practice. After Geralt and Yennefer die, Ciri's magical unicorn, Ihuarraquax, appears from the fog. With the help of Geralt and Yennefer's friends, their bodies are placed on a boat, and together with Ciri, they sail into the fog, guided by the unicorn. This scene draws a strong parallel to the legend of King Arthur, who, after being mortally wounded in the Battle of Camlann, was taken to the mystical Isle of Avalon in search of healing. The reference is further confirmed in the next

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

scene, where Geralt opens his eyes to find Yennefer beside him and sees leaves and branches heavy with apples (503). The mention of apples hints at Avalon, as it is the Welsh word for the isle of apples. Geralt inquires about Ciri's whereabouts, and Yennefer assures him that it doesn't matter what happened or where they were. She promises to never leave him (503). The narration reveals that Ciri is recounting this information to Galahad, a character from Arthurian legends, who confuses her with the famous Lady of the Lake. When Galahad asks what comes next, Ciri responds,

Nothing special,' she snorted. 'They got married. 'Tell me.' 'Aaah, what is there to tell? There was a great big wedding. They all came: Dandelion, Mother Nenneke, Iola and Eurneid, Yarpem Zigrin, Vesemir, Eskel ... Coën, Milva, Angoulême ... And my Mistle ... And I was there, I drank mead and wine. And they, I mean Geralt and Yennefer, had their own house afterwards and were happy, very, very happy. Like in a fairy tale. Do you understand?'

'Why are you weeping like that, O Lady of the Lake?' (Sapkowski 504)

By her weeping, a reader might interpret that the events Ciri is recounting are not the actual truth but the "Fairy tale" version everyone wants to hear at the end of every story, and the bitter truth is that they are, in fact, dead. Nevertheless, by implementing this reference to king Arthur's fate. Some legends suggest that he will return in the nation's hour of need, while others describe him as an eternal figure, residing in the magical realm of Avalon. Similarly, Andrzej Sapkowski leaves the interpretation of Geralt's fate to the subjectivity of the reader; those whom are grounded in reality might see that he is indeed dead and accept the bitter yet captivating and complex reality of the Witcher's tale, while others might conjure a story from their imagination, believing the famous white wolf and his beloved sorcerer are coming back. This clever creativity implemented by the author is, in fact, what gave birth to one of the most successful RPG games of all time, *The Witcher* video game trilogy.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

In order to fully grasp the complexities of Geralt's character, it is crucial to delve into the lives and perspectives of the supporting characters surrounding him. Through their interactions and relationships, a deeper understanding of Geralt's motivations, choices, and personal growth can be attained. One such significant figure is his close friend, the poet Dandelion, whose influence and unique perspective shed light on Geralt's journey and add utmost meaning to his narrative.

2.2.3 Dandelion (Jaskir)

Dandelion, the narrator of the story, also known as Jaskir in Polish, is a famous and charismatic bard and a dear whose fame was widespread throughout the continent as a result of writing about the life and tales of his dear friend and companion the renowned witcher Geralt of Rivia. He Despite their differences in profession and artistic pursuits, Dandelion and Geralt of Rivia share a deep and enduring friendship which often puzzles many.

While wounded at the temple of Melitele, the poet went to check on his friend. Before greeting him however, the priestess and mother figure of Geralt Nenneke, had to make sure he was willing to see him and thus introduced him as "That idler, parasite and good-for-nothing, that priest of art, the bright-shining star of the ballad and love poem. As usual he's radiant with fame, puffed up like a pig's bladder and stinking of beer. Do you want to see him?" (83). Geralt excitedly agrees and calls him a friend. She goes on to say that "I can't understand that friendship. He's your absolute opposite." To which the Witcher replies, "Opposites attract." (83).

This perfectly conditions the reader to expect a clash of personalities. Dandelion is arguably the cornerstone of comic relief of the story, as in the same scene the Polish author sets up that tone.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

Dandelion in a lilac jerkin with lace cuffs, his hat askew. The troubadour bowed exaggeratedly at the sight of Nenneke, the heron feather pinned to his hat sweeping the floor. ‘My deepest respects, venerable mother,’ he whined stupidly. ‘Praise be the Great Melitele and her priestesses, the springs of virtue and wisdom—’ ‘Stop talking bullshit,’ snorted Nenneke. ‘And don’t call me mother. The very idea that you could be my son fills me with horror. She turned on her heel and left, her trailing robe rustling. Dandelion, aping her, sketched a parody bow. (84).

Despite her disapproval and dismissal of his jokes and poetry, Dandelion remains undeterred, maintaining his cheerful demeanor and continuing to amuse himself with his mischievous antics. His ability to find humor in situations, even in the face of Nenneke’s sternness, underscores his optimistic outlook and resilient spirit. “‘She still can’t take a joke. She’s furious because I chatted a bit to the gate-keeper when I got here, a pretty blonde with long lashes and a virgin’s plait reaching down to her cute little bottom, which it would be a sin not to pinch (84).”

Furthermore, this statement gives insight into his flirtatious, playful, and promiscuous nature, which is often due to his clever wordplay and talent as a performer. Nevertheless, the troubadour’s good nature is demonstrated when he genuinely inquires about Geralt’s health and his effort to come visit him.

The story’s iconic duo met at the fete in Gulet where Dandelion sought refuge behind Geralt after the four brothers of the girl he got pregnant were chasing him. The poet highlights that “you almost jumped out of your pants with joy to have a companion. Until then you only had your horse for company” (87). Regardless if the statement was exaggerated or not, it captures how much valuable the poet’s companionship is to Geralt, for it takes him out of the loneliness that always surrounds him.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

His ability to make the Witcher laugh, something that is rare for Geralt, is also evident in the same scene. As Dandelion peeped into the History book Geralt was reading, he made a comment that he also read it during his academic days in Oxenfurt, for the subject of History was second on his list. This made Geralt curious about the first and asked, to which the poet replies by “‘Geography,’ said the poet seriously. ‘The atlas was bigger and it was easier to hide a demijohn of vodka behind it.’ Geralt laughed dryly” (84).

Dandelion sometimes serves as a representation of the audience’s questions or opinions. In a conversation with Geralt, who was complaining about the lack of work in the north, and how the only work he receives is based on senseless rumors such as killing a mecopterans¹⁴.

The poet suggests that if the people are willing to pay, then he should do it. Geralt interrupts him by saying he does not kill Mecopterans nor any other harmless creature. Naturally this noble gesture of not wanting to kill harmless creatures will incline the viewer to see Geralt as the opposite of the heartless monster he claims to be, some might even see him as a priest. Ironically enough this is what the bard suggests for him, to switch from being a witcher to a priest, “Become a priest. You wouldn’t be bad at it with all your scruples, your morality, your knowledge of people and of everything. The fact that you don’t believe in any gods shouldn’t be a problem - I don’t know many priests who do. Become a priest and stop feeling sorry for yourself.’. (85)”.

The first novel *Blood of Elves* gives more insight to the bard’s personality, character and mindset.

¹⁴ Mecopterans are non-threatening beings that are pursued for the extraction of their hand bones. These bones are finely ground and utilized as an ingredient in soups, with claims of potential benefits for treating ailments unrelated to impotence.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

He knew the University grounds like the back of his hand – and no wonder, considering he had studied there for four years, then had lectured for a year in the Faculty of Trouvereship and Poetry. The post of lecturer had been offered to him when he had passed his final exams with full marks, to the astonishment of professors with whom he had earned the reputation of lazybones, rake and idiot during his studies. Then, when, after several years of roaming around the country with his lute, his fame as a minstrel had spread far and wide, the Academy had taken great pains to have him visit and give guest lectures. Dandelion yielded to their requests only sporadically, for his love of wandering was constantly at odds with his predilection for comfort, luxury and a regular income. And also, of course, with his liking for the town of Oxenfurt (167)

This passage serves to debunk the notion that the bard is merely a fool, highlighting his intelligence and complexity. Furthermore, it showcases that his nature of being a wanderer and a free soul, in addition to being impulsive and lacking restraint is what stops him from leading a stable, and steady life. In fact, in the fifth novel *Lady of the Lake*, Dandelion engage in a love affair with the duchess of Toussaint, Anna Henrietta, who granted him “lands, estates, copses, forests and castles” (447). Being the ducal consort Toussaint was not enough for the bard, however, for he was about to be publicly executed by having his head chopped off with an axe as ordered by the duchess for having another affair behind her back with the baron’s daughter, in addition to other crimes such as “lèsemajesté, treason, and furthermore sullyng the dignity of the noble estate through perjury, lampooning, calumny and slander, also roistering and indecency as well as debauchery, in other words harlotry.” (447).

The poet is so out of touch that he tells Geralt and Ciri after revealing that information regarding the duchess who just pardoned him at the last minute, but casted him

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

out from Toussaint definitively "...now she's sure to have cooled off. Understood that a man isn't created for monogamy. She's forgiven me and is no doubt waiting—" 'You're hopelessly stupid,' stated Geralt, and Ciri confirmed she thought the same with an energetic nod of her head." (452). Dandelion's disregard for the gravity of his actions and his belief that he could easily be forgiven reveal his inherent arrogance and a lack of empathy towards the consequences he imposes on others.

Dijkstra the head of Redanian Intelligence describes Dandelion as "... almost forty, look almost thirty, think you're just over twenty and act as though you're barely ten" (171). Dandelion is depicted as someone who is seen as immature, lacking self-awareness, and having a tendency to act without thinking. Nevertheless, he is also a loyal companion to Geralt, in the same scene of the quote, he is being interrogated about the whereabouts of Geralt and Ciri by the Dijkstra, Ori Reuven, secretary to the chief of Redanian spies and the sorcerer Philippa Eilhart. Despite knowing his location, the troubadour covers up for his friend and pretends to be clueless.

Another occasion where his loyalty was proven was when he was being tortured brutally by the sorcerer Rience a mage who was given the task of locating Ciri after her disappearance during the massacre in Cintra. The bard endured a great deal of punishment before he was saved by Yennefer. More than that, while he and Geralt were facing death as captives to the Elves in the short story "The edge of the world", the Witcher attempted to reason with the elves to at least let Dandelion live, but despite his fear, he maintained that if they freed him "You can be sure, you son-of-a-bitch. Kill me too, because I promise otherwise I'll set the world against you" (106).

The importance of Dandelion's character extends way further than just being a mere comic relief addition or a companion for the White wolf. Him being the "opposite" of Geralt serves a greater purpose for highlighting the character of the Witcher. Dandelion's

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

talkative and outgoing nature contrasts with Geralt's reserved and introspective demeanor. While Dandelion actively pursues love interests, and debauchery, Geralt keeps emotional distance and grapples with his own feelings and he is loyal to Yennefer. Dandelion seeks comfort and enjoys the luxuries of life, whereas Geralt is accustomed to hardship and embraces a rugged lifestyle. Dandelion relies on charm and wit, while Geralt relies on combat skills and instincts. Furthermore, Dandelion's carefree and carelessly optimistic attitude stands in contrast to Geralt's burdensome responsibilities and moral dilemmas. This clear contrast emphasizes the stoic and declined nature of Geralt and make the reader appreciate it more

Another significant role is given to the character of Dandelion by Sapkowski. The troubadour often over dramatizes the life of Geralt of Rivia the famous "white wolf", while doing so, the poet reduces the complexities of love, the destruction of wars and the intricate moral dilemmas faced by Geralt in his journey as a Witcher to mere romanticized tales of adventure and heroism. An example of this would be the time when Geralt had a brief romantic relationship with Dandelion's friend and rival, the bardess Essi Daven. Geralt developed a fleeting interest in her, but his profound love for his beloved sorceress, Yennefer, prevented him from reciprocating Essi's feelings. The two were eventually parted ways but in Dandelion's balled "told of a certain witcher and a certain poet. About how the witcher and the poet met on the seashore, among the crying of seagulls, and how they fell in love at first sight. About how beautiful and powerful was their love. About how nothing—not even death—was able to destroy that love and part them." (225). This is of course, the romanticized representation of the events. In the harsh reality, the resolve was much darker.

The Witcher and Essi parted ways and four years later she died from smallpox during an epidemic in Vizima. "About how he, Dandelion, had carried her out in his arms between corpses being cremated on funeral pyres and had buried her far from the city, in

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

the forest, alone and peaceful, and, as she had asked, buried two things with her: her lute and her sky blue pearl. The pearl from which she was never parted” (225). Dandelion made the conscious choice not to perform the revised ballad, recognizing that the true account lacked the emotional impact that listeners sought for he knew “. In doing so, he kept the poignant truth hidden and preserved the enchanting illusion he had created around the story, but never sang it again after her death. The focus shifts from Dandelion’s role as a troubadour and storyteller to the character of Yennefer. Yennefer’s profound influence on Geralt’s journey which reveals a complex and transformative relationship between them.

2.2.4 Yennefer of Vengerberg

As Sapkowski himself stated regarding the creation of the character of Yennefer of Vengerberg, “I created a female character who refuses to be a fantasy stereotype. To please the reader.” Her nature can be described as enigmatic since she often does not reveal her plans and works incognito and implicitly. Yennefer defies any obstacle that stands between her and her goals. For example, she was willing to risk her life and the lives of everyone in the town of Rinde to capture a djinn which she intended to exploit for her own self-interest.

Arguably, her biggest desire is to conceive a child of her own. However, the process of becoming a sorcerer sterilized her, as Nenneke explained to Geralt, “Like most female magicians, her ovaries are atrophied, and it’s irreversible” (113). The irony lies in the fact that her newfound powers allow her to perform wonders such as curing, healing, destroying, enchanting, and even conjuring creational magic, which is considered the most elevated accomplishment among sorcerers (103). Yet, she cannot create a life form inside her. Furthermore, she makes a fortune as an abortionist for wealthy women and can even cure other women’s infertility, but she cannot cure her own. This irony underscores the notion that sometimes the very skills or talents an individual possesses can be used to help others while simultaneously highlighting their own unattainable desires.

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

During her childhood, Yennefer was a hunchback and deformed. She even attempted suicide due to the hardships she endured. Through the use of magic, her mentor Tissaia de Vriess managed to fix her, transforming her into one of the most beautiful characters in the story. She is often described as having a pale triangular face, violet eyes, and narrow, slightly contorted lips beneath her black tresses (120). The cruel and tough personality defined by chaos and absurdism is potentially a mere façade and a means to forget and escape her insecurities. Underneath it all lies a vulnerable, weak hunchback who craves warmth, care, and support (Corbett 86). This complexity and multifacetedness are what Sapkowski desired for the character of Yennefer.

Similarly, Geralt, like Yennefer, had to develop a façade due to his perturbed past and challenging upbringing as an outcast mutant despised and persecuted by many. Since their first meeting, Yennefer saw through Geralt's good nature, the nature he never admits to having, simply by giving her the cup of apple juice she desired first, despite him being in a hurry to ask for her help in curing the critically ill Dandelion. The clash of their facades prolonged their relationship. However, after living together for a year, Yennefer felt bitter towards Geralt when he refused to accompany her to meetings with other mages. Eventually, Geralt leaves Vengerberg after a year of living together, leaving Yennefer bitter. This reveals her vulnerability and the emotional impact of their separation, despite her concealing her fear of abandonment behind her pride (Corbett 86).

On the other hand, Geralt's insecurity hinders their relationship in the town of Aedd Gynael, as he refuses to confess his love, believing himself incapable of it. Nevertheless, Geralt's love for Yennefer remains unwavering, even though he could pursue other romantic relationships. He knows that no one will understand and accept his mutation as much as she does, as she can relate to him in one way or another.

The rekindling of their relationship occurs when Geralt asks for Yennefer's aid in harnessing Ciri's newly emerging magical abilities that are spiraling out of control. It is at

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

the end of the book *Blood of Elves* where readers can grasp Yennefer's personality through her interaction with Ciri. Initially, Yennefer comes off as cruel and strict, and even the young Ciri does not take a liking to her. However, with time, the strictness reveals itself to the reader as that of a loving mother rather than malice or prejudice. The two quickly become close during the training process and develop a mother-daughter bond. This bond is captured in a moment where Ciri, in distress, speaks about her past and the war in Cintra. Yennefer assures her, "You will [stay with us]. And I'm going to be with you, Ciri. Always. I promise you" (238). Shortly after, Ciri calls her "mama," and out of worry, when Ciri harms herself, Yennefer instinctively calls her "daughter." (255).

Yennefer's protective nature towards Ciri and her efforts to shield her from harm can be seen as manifestations of her unfulfilled desire for a child. She sees in Ciri the opportunity to care for and guide someone, channeling her maternal instincts towards the young girl who has become a significant part of her life. The relationship between them can be summarized in Cirella's thought, "We understood - both she and I - that we can laugh and talk together about him. About Geralt. Suddenly we became close, although I knew perfectly well that Geralt both brought us together and separated us, and that's how it would always be" (260).

Cirella was what cemented the relationship of Yennefer and Geralt, and made them grow past their insecurities and share the love they could not utter for each other. For example, at the end of the final canon novel *Lady of the Lake* Yennefer is seeing admitting how she truly feels about Geralt after her friend Triss, whom also had a romantic interest in him, was accompanying her to see him by telling her, "He's my man, mine and only mine! Do you understand? You're to stop talking about him, you're to stop thinking about him, you're to stop delighting in his noble character ... Right away, at once! Oh, I feel like grabbing you by that ginger mop of hair" (491). Her commitment truly shone when she died beside him trying to revive him helplessly in a gesture of love, sacrifice and

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

selflessness, the opposite of the traits which the reader might have had on her, While Yennefer is known for her assertiveness, confidence, and manipulative nature, Triss is portrayed as more gentle, compassionate, and emotionally vulnerable

2.2.5 Triss Merigold

One way to look at the character of the sorcerer Triss Merigold is through contrasting her with Yennefer, her friend and romantic rival. While Yennefer is more composed, dominant, and prideful, Triss, being younger, is more submissive, emotional, less assertive, and characterized by her timidity in the face of danger. She is described as having “auburn” or “chestnut hair” and “blue eyes.” (63)

The contrast in their personalities can be highlighted in their training of Ciri. At Geralt’s request, Triss was invited to Kaer Morhen to help control Ciri’s newfound abilities. Unlike Yennefer, who was strict and motherly in her teaching, Triss acted more like a bigger sister to Ciri. In the third novel, *Baptism of Fire*, she thought to herself, “And perhaps I’ll finally learn who Ciri really is. Ciri; the Queen of the North to them, but the flaxen-haired witcher-girl of Kaer Morhen to me. A girl I still think of as a younger sister” (239). She ultimately fails to help Ciri as her powers prove insufficient and then urges Geralt to ask for Yennefer’s help. In this scene, however, she reveals her insecurities through a complex mixture of guilt and self-deprecation. Triss regrets the mistake of seducing Geralt with the help of a little magic (50). Despite Geralt and Yennefer having a miserable relationship, Triss is jealous of them, and her actions demonstrate symptoms of borderline personality disorder.

Contrary to Yennefer, who demonstrates pride and composure when she and Geralt part ways, Triss appears desperate and throws herself at Geralt, saying, “She threw her arms around his neck, instantly, without thinking” (52), and begging him to be with her. She often mistakes his gentle nature for love. On their journey to the temple of Melitele, Triss falls sick due to a stomach disease, and ironically, she is allergic to the magic elixirs she

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

specializes in. Geralt and Ciri have to take care of her needs, such as bathing and combing, but Triss tries to take advantage of the situation to get closer to Geralt in a rather pathetic way. Yarpen, the dwarf who is riding along with them, warns Ciri about mistaking compassion for something else (122).

At the end of the story, the reader witnesses the character development Triss goes through as she and Yennefer rush to rescue the dying Geralt in Rivia. The town is in chaos, and people are getting murdered, which frightens Triss and makes her want to abandon Ciri and Geralt. Yennefer's response to her highlights the difference between the two sorcerers: "Flee if you want to!" she cried. "Hide behind the skirts of your Lodge! I have something to defend! I shan't leave Ciri alone. Or Geralt! Get away" (493). Yennefer embodies courage and determination, unafraid to confront danger and fiercely protective of her loved ones. In contrast, Triss succumbs to fear, seeking escape rather than facing challenges head-on.

Shortly after, Triss returns to Yennefer's aid, stating, "No, Yennefer. I shan't run away. I shan't hide behind the Lodge's skirts. And don't worry, I shan't faint from fear like I did at Sodden. I shall vanquish it inside me. I've already vanquished it!" (495). This moment gives closure to Triss's character as she finally puts her cowardice behind her. Triss manages to cast "Merigold's Destructive Hailstorm" (506), a spell conjured accidentally due to her tongue faltering from fear.

Triss's journey of overcoming fear and embracing courage lays the foundation for her portrayal in the game adaptation. Her character development, from vulnerability to resilience, captures the essence of her role as a powerful sorceress and a reliable ally to Geralt. In the game, players witness the culmination of Triss's growth, cementing her as a beloved and integral character in the *Witcher* universe.

2.2.6 Cirilla

Ciri serves as the central pillar of the *Witcher*'s plot, connecting all the elements together. Born to Pavetta and Emyhr var Emreis, she becomes an unexpected child of destiny for Geralt, the Rivian white wolf and Witcher. Their first meeting takes place in the forest of Brokilon, where Geralt, unaware of her identity, tries to help her return home. During this encounter, Geralt imparts a valuable lesson to Ciri through a bedtime story, which later saves her from the knights. She is described as having "fair, mousy hair and huge, glaringly green eyes" (235). Ciri's rebellion against her royal life and her tomboyish nature provide insights into her character. She expresses her desire to go home, rejecting the role of a princess or the wife of a man named Kistrin (249). From the beginning, Ciri is drawn to Geralt, clinging tightly to him (248). After reuniting with Geralt for the second time, she accompanies him to Kaer Morhen, where she is to be trained as a witcher. Although she is not subjected to the Trial of Grasses like other witchers, she receives natural witcher stimulants to enhance her abilities (40). Unbeknownst to Geralt, a storm is brewing around Ciri, as she is the legitimate heir to the throne of Cintra and possesses the Elder blood, which grants her supernatural powers and the ability to travel through space and time. Surrounded by prophecies and sought after by various factions, including her father, Emperor Emyhr var Emreis, Ciri becomes a focal point of conflict. The Wild Hunt, a group of Aen Elle elves led by Eredin, also seeks to obtain her power and dominate multiple dimensions. Despite enduring countless trials, Ciri manages to reunite with her foster parents, Yennefer and Geralt, before they meet their demise in Rivia. She then takes them to the Isle of Avalon in the Arthurian world. Ciri's final appearance in the book occurs as she recounts the tragic events to Galahad.

The direct intertextuality between Ciri and Galahad in "Lady of the Lake" and the Arthurian legends piques the reader's curiosity. Delving deeper into Galahad's story reveals numerous similarities between the two characters. Both Galahad and Ciri are

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

connected to renowned parent figures who significantly shape their narratives. Galahad, as the son of Lancelot, King Arthur's most famous knight, inherits a lineage of great importance to his journey. Similarly, Ciri, as the daughter of Emhyr var Emreis and Pavetta, descended from Lara Dorren and possessing the Elder Blood, possesses a significant heritage. Both characters are destined for extraordinary quests that define their identities. Galahad is prophesied to surpass his father and find the Holy Grail, embarking on a spiritual journey that tests his purity and knightly virtues. Likewise, Ciri, as the Child of Destiny, possesses unique powers and becomes entangled in a complex web of political intrigue and magical conflicts, with her fate intertwined with the fate of multiple worlds. Furthermore, Galahad and Ciri demonstrate exceptional abilities and skills that set them apart from their peers. Despite their shared similarities, Ciri's harsh experiences have made her a multi-dimensional and damaged character, grounded in reality. This is evident in her demeanor and conversation with Galahad, where she questions his romanticized vision and instead focuses on practicalities (506). However, she unexpectedly finds herself attracted to him, and they join hands, riding side by side (506). This interpretation could be seen as the new authors building upon the foundations laid by previous authors, as each era brings its own characteristics and qualities while staying rooted in the fundamental elements of the original work.

2.3 Conclusion

The work of Sapkowski is a testament of how fictional characters can exude realistic aura. Through coating the characters in a layer of moral ambiguity, complex dilemmas, and a realistic depiction of relationships, he avoids creating a purely escapist narrative. In a sense, this approach allows for the readers to embark in the fantasy world he created, while simultaneously having a metaphorical seatbelt which grounds them in reality.

Furthermore, this grounding can captivate even those who are not keen on the genre of fantasy. The realistic aspects of the characters can potentially evoke a sense of empathy

Chapter Two: Characters in *The Witcher*: Exploring a Critique of Fantasy, Rational Dark Reality, and Game Adaptation

within the reader, resulting in an investment and curiosity to see the journey of these identifiable characters through. Ensuring that their journey through the pages is one of both enchantment and reflection.

The characters of Sapkowski serve as a compelling criticism of the clichés often found in fairytales. Through his adept use of pastiche, he skillfully deconstructs and subverts many of the traditional tropes associated with the genre only to subvert them with unexpected twists and turns. By playing with readers' expectations, he dismantles the simplistic and predictable narratives often found in traditional fairytales.

Sapkowski's characters grapple with moral dilemmas that question the simplistic notions of good and evil. They embody the gray areas of human nature, reflecting the complexities and contradictions inherent in real-life individuals. This nuanced portrayal serves as a critique of the oversimplification often seen in fantasy, where characters are typically divided into stark categories of right and wrong.

His work serves as a reminder that storytelling is a dynamic and evolving art, capable of shedding light on the human condition and serving as a vehicle for social commentary. In this way, Sapkowski's characters stand not only as vivid and captivating creations but also as beacons of critique, pushing the boundaries of traditional fairytale narratives and challenging readers to question the underlying assumptions and stereotypes embedded within these stories.

Chapter Three: Character Customization in *The Witcher* Video Games

3.1 Introduction

There is no denying that many perceive video games as an escapist medium concerned with pushing buttons and achieving a high score. The Polish author is no exception. Andrzej Sapkowski often voiced his disapproval of video games as a medium of expression. This, however, did not stop him from selling the licensing rights of his work to game developers.

This belief was further strengthened when the first ever video game adaptation of the *Witcher* in 1996, by the Polish development studio Metropolis Software, got canceled. This is why when he was approached again in 2003 by yet another Polish video-game developer studio, CD Projekt Red, Sapkowski did not anticipate the great success the game will go on to achieve.

CD Projekt Red is a renowned Polish video game development and publishing company. Founded in 2002. The studio's most notable and successful franchise is *The Witcher*, based on the fantasy book series by Andrzej Sapkowski. CD Projekt Red developed and released three main entries in *The Witcher* series: *The Witcher* (2007), *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011), and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015). *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* in particular received widespread critical acclaim and numerous Game of the Year awards for its immersive storytelling, vast open world, and engaging gameplay.

The Witcher (2007), is the first installment that introduced players to the world of Geralt of Rivia. The game retcons the death of the White wolf and sets the players in a non-canon narrative, built upon the books' ending. *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011) is the sequel continue to Geralt's journey with a more complex and politically charged narrative. *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015), is the most popular out of the three. Not only it outshines its predecessors, it is considered a landmark title in the RPG genre.

The Witcher games are known for their nonlinear storytelling, where choices have consequences that ripple throughout the game's world. The morally gray nature of the

characters and the intricate web of political intrigue contribute to a complex narrative that often explores themes of discrimination, choice, and the consequences of one's actions.

Beyond the main quests, *The Witcher* games are filled with engaging side quests, richly detailed environments, and memorable characters. Players can explore the diverse landscapes of the game's world, including dense forests, war-torn villages, bustling cities, and treacherous swamps. The games also feature a crafting system, allowing players to create weapons, armor, and other items using materials found in the world.

Additionally, the games feature a robust combat system that combines swordplay, magic, and alchemy. Players can engage in real-time combat, utilizing a variety of weapons, spells, and potions to overcome enemies. Geralt's skills and abilities can be upgraded through an RPG-like progression system, allowing players to tailor their playstyle.

The nature of the interactive storytelling in *The Witcher* games, coupled with the players' ability to make consequential decisions that challenge their moral compass within a limited time frame, enhances their investment in the story. These games take into consideration the players' biases and provide choices that may deviate from Geralt's own decisions. Instead, they acknowledge the players' subjectivity and offer a level of agency, allowing them to shape the narrative and create a more personalized experience.

Moreover, the ability to customize Geralt further blurs the line between the player and the character, heightening the sense of immersion. Players can tailor Geralt's appearance, skills, and abilities to align with their desired playstyle, deepening their connection to the protagonist. This fosters a unique sense of ownership over the story and a feeling that the world truly responds to the player's choices, allowing for a deeper emotional investment.

Even without direct involvement from author Andrzej Sapkowski, CD Projekt Red's remarkable ability to honor the source material of *The Witcher* series is deeply rooted in

their Polish heritage and the high cultural esteem in which Polish people hold *the Witcher* title. Their understanding and respect for Sapkowski's world, combined with their meticulous attention to detail, enabled them to create an authentic and immersive adaptation that resonates with fans all over the world.

This chapter explores the similarities between Sapkowski's *Witcher* book series and the video game adaptation by CD Projekt Red. It discusses how the game enhances the character of Geralt through decision-making and customization, highlighting the interactive nature of the medium and its ability to engage readers and players in Geralt's persona.

3.2 From Skepticism to Sapkowski's Reflections on *The Witcher* Games

Disappointment

First and for most, it is important to understand Andrzej Sapkowski's stance on video games. Robert Purchase, from EuroGamer who met and interviewed the Polish author states in his article *Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the writer who created *The Witcher** that "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" (Purchase), and the only motivation he had for selling the rights and licensing to CD Projekt Red was money. He maintained "Well they brought a big bag of money... What I expect from an adaptation: a big bag of money. That is all" (Purchase). As such, the author left total freedom to the game company to run the project. His view was categorical when asked if he was advantageous due to the games, he answered 'Yes, to the same extent I helped the games.' It was not so that the games promote me: I promoted the games with my name and characters" (Purchase)

Despite the huge success and revenue, the games made, Sapkowski earns nothing, something which aggravates him greatly

I was stupid enough to sell them rights to the whole bunch, They offered me a percentage of their profits. I said, ‘No, there will be no profit at all - give me all my money right now! The whole amount.’ It was stupid. I was stupid enough to leave everything in their hands because I didn’t believe in their success. But who could foresee their success? I couldn’t. (Purchase)

Sapkowski’s reflection is a profound testament to the unpredictable and transformative nature of the video game medium. His initial skepticism and decision to sell the rights to *The Witcher* series without foreseeing its immense success highlight the inherent risks and uncertainties faced by creators in the gaming industry. Nevertheless, the exceptional achievements of CD Projekt Red with *The Witcher* games demonstrate the remarkable potential of video games as a medium for immersive storytelling, captivating gameplay, and cultural influence.

3.3 Cd Projekt Red The *Witcher* Series

CD Projekt Red’s developer team expanded upon the world and characters that were created by Andrzej Sapkowski . They introduced an open-ended narrative structure in their video game adaptations. The story’s characters and themes, which are grounded in reality, allowed avid fantasy readers to relate and potentially see themselves in the characters. This combined with the story’s emphasis on making choices/decisions and their consequences on the grand scheme of the narrative, allowed for a smooth adaptation to the medium of video games, that excels in immersive storytelling and interactive engagement.

According to Franca Quarneti’s article from Benzinga, the United States financial news website, “CEO and president Adam Kiciński announced that ‘*The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*’ has surpassed 50 million copies sold worldwide, marking a significant milestone for the highly acclaimed game’.” (*‘The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt’ Joins Elite Ranks, Clocks 50 Million Sales, ‘The Witcher 4’ Teased For 2025*). A part of CD Projekt RED’s success is treating the game as a polish heritage.

Being Polish themselves, the studio realizes the weight *The Witcher* title or *Wiedźmin* (polish) holds as an intellectual property for the Polish people. It is held to a high esteem by many and even considered as cultural phenomenon. “The Witcher plays a huge part in the world of Polish culture. The fascinating dark fantasy adventure based on the world of monster hunters is a cultural favourite for Poles.” (*Forbes*). In fact, during his visit to Poland in 2011, the former United State president Barack Obama, former Poland Prime Minister Donald Tusk gave him a diplomatic gift, which included *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011) video game and two books that inspired the popular computer game (SOURCE). The loyalty to the adaptation is demonstrated through the homage paid to the source material narrative which the game is based on and heavily reference from.

3.3.1 *The Witcher 1* (2007) Plot

Geralt of Rivia, who wakes up with no memory, is taken to Kaer Morhen, the witcher stronghold, by his comrades. The Salamandra, a group of bandits, launches an attack on Kaer Morhen and steals the mutagenic potions that enhance the abilities of witchers. Determined to find the Salamandra, Geralt and his lover, Triss Merigold, who took advantage of his amnesia to start a relationship with him, travel to Vizima, the capital city ruled by King Foltest of Temeria.

During their journey, they encounter Alvin, a young child with magical powers who foresees the destruction of the world. Geralt also learns about the ongoing conflict between the Scoia'tael, a group of rogue elves, and the Order of the Flaming Rose, a military organization tasked with protecting Temeria.

As Geralt continues his hunt for the Salamandra, he repeatedly crosses paths with Azar Javed and the Professor, but they manage to elude him. Along the way, Geralt discovers that Princess Adda, whom he had previously saved from a curse, is now working with the Salamandra. Adda tries to have Geralt arrested, but Triss intervenes and saves him by teleporting them away.

Geralt takes care of Alvin for a while and provides him with an amulet to control his unpredictable powers. The conflict between the Order of the Flaming Rose and the Scoia'tael eventually reaches their location near a lake outside Vizima. During the chaos, Alvin mysteriously teleports himself away and disappears.

In the midst of a civil war between the Order and the Scoia'tael in Old Vizima, King Foltest informs Geralt that Princess Adda's curse has resurfaced, seeking his help once again. After resolving the curse, Geralt discovers that Azar Javed was merely a pawn and that the true mastermind behind the Salamandra is Jacques de Aldersberg, the Grand Master of the Order.

In a climactic confrontation, Geralt battles Jacques, who transports them both to a potential future resembling the apocalyptic world foreseen by Alvin. Jacques reveals his plan to create a race of super-human guardians using the witcher mutagenic potions, aiming to protect humanity from this cataclysmic future. Geralt emerges victorious, but to his surprise, he finds Jacques wearing the same amulet he had given to Alvin. This revelation suggests that Alvin, in his disappearance, may have traveled back in time and become Jacques de Aldersberg. The story concludes with Geralt foiling an assassination attempt on King Foltest and discovering that the would-be assassin is another witcher.

3.3.2 *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* (2011) Plot

Geralt of Rivia finds himself imprisoned in Temeria for the assassination of King Foltest. With the help of Vernon Roche, the commander of the Blue Stripes, Geralt escapes to the city of Flotsam with Triss Merigold. In Flotsam, Geralt encounters Iorveth, the leader of the Scoia'tael, but manages to escape the ensuing attack. Geralt agrees to deal with a troublesome monster in the area with the assistance of Sile de Tansarville, a sorceress. The assassin Letho, who betrayed the Scoia'tael, kidnaps Triss. Geralt must choose between siding with Iorveth or Roche, which significantly impacts the story.

If Geralt chooses Iorveth's path, they take refuge in the city of Vergen. Philippa Eilhart, a sorceress, informs Geralt that Triss is held captive by Nilfgaardian forces. Geralt infiltrates the Nilfgaardian camp but is captured. With Roche's help, he escapes. Geralt breaks a curse on the battlefield and defends Vergen from King Henselt's army. They make their way to Loc Muinne for a summit of leaders.

If Geralt chooses Roche's path, they seek refuge in the Kaedweni camp. Geralt learns that Triss is held by Nilfgaard and aids in breaking a battlefield curse. He saves King Henselt from witcher assassins and uncovers Sile and Philippa's involvement. The fate of King Henselt and the rebels depends on Geralt's choices. Geralt and Roche head to Loc Muinne in search of Sile, Philippa, and Letho.

In Loc Muinne, Geralt, aligned with either Iorveth or Roche, confronts Philippa, who is imprisoned. Geralt has the option to rescue Triss or aid Philippa's escape. During a summit of leaders, it is revealed that the sorceresses manipulated Saskia, who is a dragon in human form, for their own purposes. Geralt tracks down Sile, confronts her, and deals with the dragon's attack.

In the epilogue, the outcomes of Geralt's choices become apparent. The mage Conclave may be re-established or a witch hunt may ensue. Letho reveals that the Nilfgaard Emperor orchestrated the assassinations to destabilize the region before an invasion. Geralt recovers some of his lost memory and recalls his past with Yennefer, his lover, and their search for their adopted daughter, Ciri. Yennefer is held captive in Nilfgaard. The game concludes with Nilfgaard's invasion into the north.

3.4 From Pages to Pixels: Witcher Novels Enrich Wild Hunt 3

The open world of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* exemplifies CD Projekt Red's remarkable accomplishment in translating Andrzej Sapkowski's vast universe into a visually stunning and highly detailed digital landscape. The players have the ability to roam free the detailed world, filled with various monsters and witchcraft, which was merely a

visualization of text in their minds. CD Projekt Red demonstrates a commendable commitment to faithfulness in the architecture portrayed in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. The developers painstakingly recreate the architectural styles and details found in Andrzej Sapkowski's literary universe, paying homage to the source material and enhancing the overall immersion of the game world.

Despite the absence of the author, CD Projekt Red, managed to stay loyal to the book by referencing them throughout the story while simultaneously making it easier for the new players, who are solely interested in the game to understand the plot. Nevertheless, reading the book will give an extra layer and dimension to the already rich narrative. By understanding the struggles and the backstory of the characters in the game such as Geralt, Yennefer, Triss, Ciri and Dandelion, many easter eggs, dialogs and inside jokes will fly above the reader's head.

Moreover, many of the awe-inspiring moments implemented by the developers will not evoke the intended emotional reaction in the readers' heart. For instance, the game begins with the player experiencing Geralt's dream in Kare Morhen which serve both as a starting point for the game's plot line, and an introduction to the game's mechanics such as the combat system, sign casting and maneuvering. What is often missed by the regular player, who in addition to not previously reading the books, just want to kill monsters and not bother with storytelling part of the game, are the many rich details implemented by CD Projekt RED. For instance, the dream itself unveils so many things about the characters.

One such example is Yennefer's characteristics. Despite being mentioned in the other games, she was never present until the third game, *Wild Hunt*. In it, the developers cleverly implement some of her iconic traits and background from the books. These implementations take the form of intractable items laid all over the room, which the player is put into at the very beginning of the game. It is important to note, however, that they are not an essential part of the game moving forward, therefore, one can easily miss them. Geralt and Yennefer first met in the book *The Last Wish*, and the way their first encounter

took place was when Geralt handed her a cup of juice. The game references this when Geralt interacts with a goblet on the table.



Figure 1: Geralt “running out of juice”

Another thing Yennefer is known for is her iconic Lilac; gooseberries perfume, and black and white outfit. The game references this in a similar manner.



Figure 2 : Geralt making a comment about Yennefer’s black and white clothes



Figure 3: Geralt interacting with Yennefer's lilac and gooseberries perfume.

In this way, the game summarized for the player the most iconic and important aspects about Yennefer in the books without a blatant description. The entire dream reflects Geralt's profound desires. In the dream he is with his beloved sorcerer Yennefer and their adopted child of destiny, Ciri whom he trains right after leaving the room just as he did many times in the witchers' keep Kaer Morhen alongside his fellow brethren Lambert, Eskel and his mentor Vesimir. The dream also reveals to the player Geralt's worst fear by turning his dream into a nightmare. During their training Ciri runs and climbs a wall then time freezes and the wild hunt appears and kill her right in front of his eyes ending the dream and the tutorial phase of the game.

The game's narrative is not something out of the box. Similarly to the books, Ciri is lost and chased by the wild hunt, while Geralt and Yennefer collaborate to track her down using Geralt's enhanced witcher senses. In his quest to do so, he encounters many new and old characters from the book along the way. The game's characters are vast and, at times, it is overwhelming for the player to keep track of all of them. As such, the developers acknowledged this and designed a character index which gives a brief description about the character told by the poet Dandelion in his egocentric and satirical tone.



Figure 4: The character index in alphabetical order on the left and the Dandelion's description on the right.

Indeed, the characters are not the only thing that can be overwhelming for the player. *The Witcher* series is essentially a story about a professional monster slayer for hire. As such, both the books incorporate a massive collection of various monsters, each one with its unique features, strengths, and weakness. To help the player recollect all of that, the game also designed an index for the beasts in the game entitled "Bestiary". In it, the player finds information about the monster, its type, and elements they are vulnerable against.

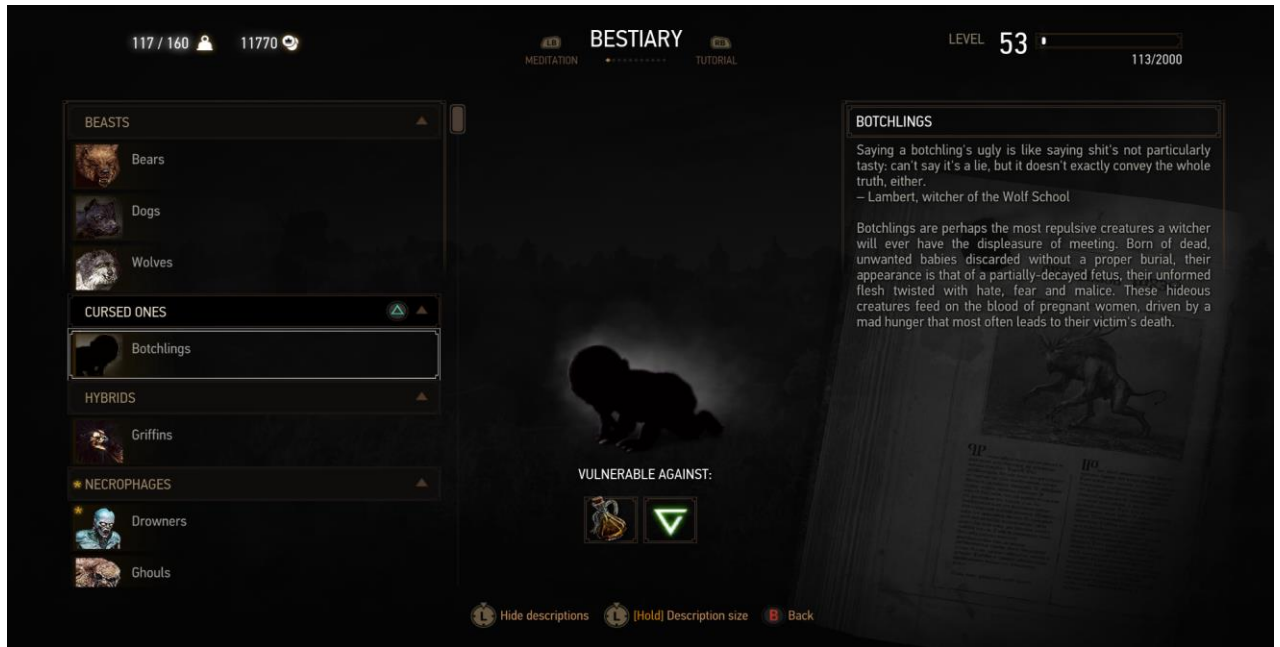


Figure 5: An example of a cursed monster called Botchling with its description to the right and vulnerabilities at the bottom.

In the same vein of characters, in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, Ciri, Geralt's disciple and adopted daughter, was introduced as a playable character for the first time in the games. The way in which she was introduced gave a narrative callback for the book readers. In the book *Sword of Destiny*, Geralt comes across a ten year old Ciri, who he presumed lost in the forest of Brokilon, on a tree trunk, but claims she is not "A small creature in a short grey jacket was standing in a small clearing, at the foot of a rocky cliff, with its back pressed against the trunk of a withered hornbeam." (Sapkowski 234). In the games, the first appearance for Ciri is in a wild forest and the first thing she encounters is a little girl around ten years old lost in a wild forest on a tree trunk.



Figure 6: Ciri meets the little girl

Figure 6 shows that the player has the ability to answer the little girl’s question with “No. I never am” lost. In the book, Ciri, tells Geral a similar answer stating ““Not a chance! I never get lost.”” (Sapkowski 243).

Another notable method by which games incorporate source material from books is through the inclusion of actual books within the game, thereby creating a metafictional element. Throughout the game, the player can come across various books which gives insight to the profound world of *the witcher* universe including the characters.

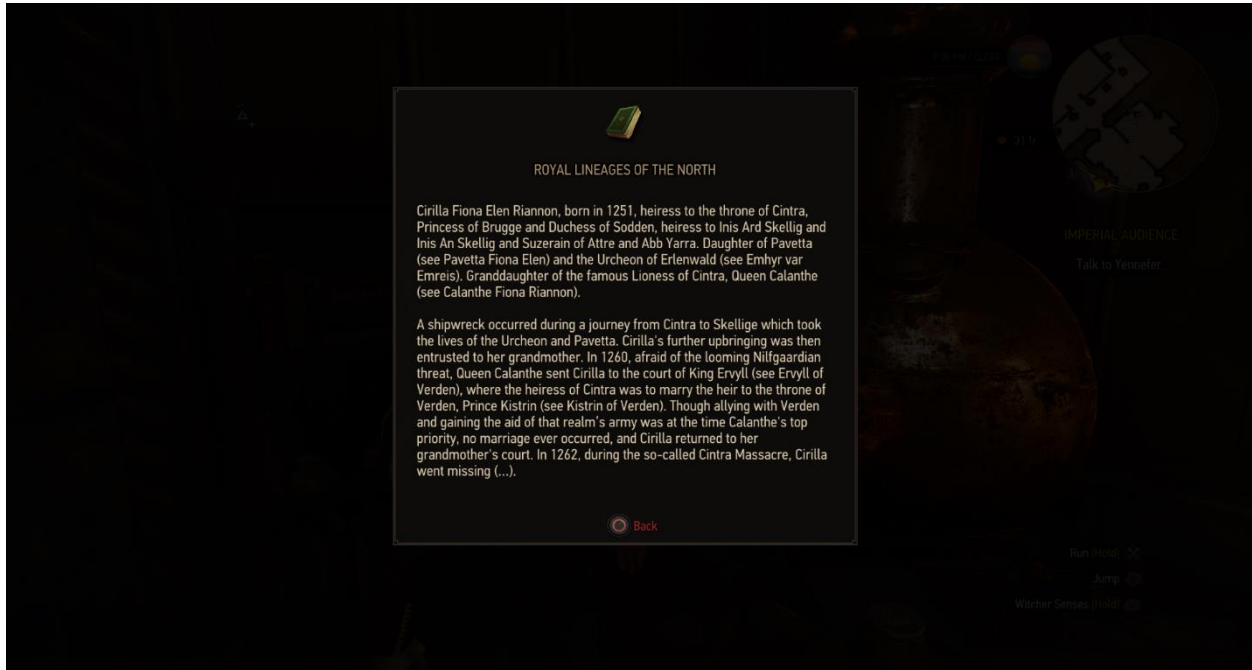


Figure 7: A book entitled ROYAL LINEAGES OF THE NORTH describing the background of Ciri's characters as depicted in the books

The critically acclaimed game, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, showcases a remarkable advancement in storytelling as it merges the established narrative foundation of *the Witcher* novels with immersive gameplay elements. This unique combination empowers players to engage with the story actively, enabling them to shape the narrative trajectory and affect the outcomes within the game.

3.5 Rewriting Destiny: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt's* Interactive Narrative and Player Agency

Within the realm of video games, the concept of storytelling has undergone a transformative shift, granting players the ability to actively participate in altering the established narratives. By immersing players in a world deeply rooted in Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* novels, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* not only embraces the existing narrative foundation but also offers a dynamic gameplay experience where player choices

hold the power to reshape the course of events and diverge from the established path. This is done through what is known as the branching narrative. O. Riedl and Young explains that “Since the behaviors the user performs in the virtual world can affect the way in which a storyline unfolds, interactive narrative systems often use a branching story structure where non-interactive story presentations are interleaved with user decision points” (Riedl & Young 1).

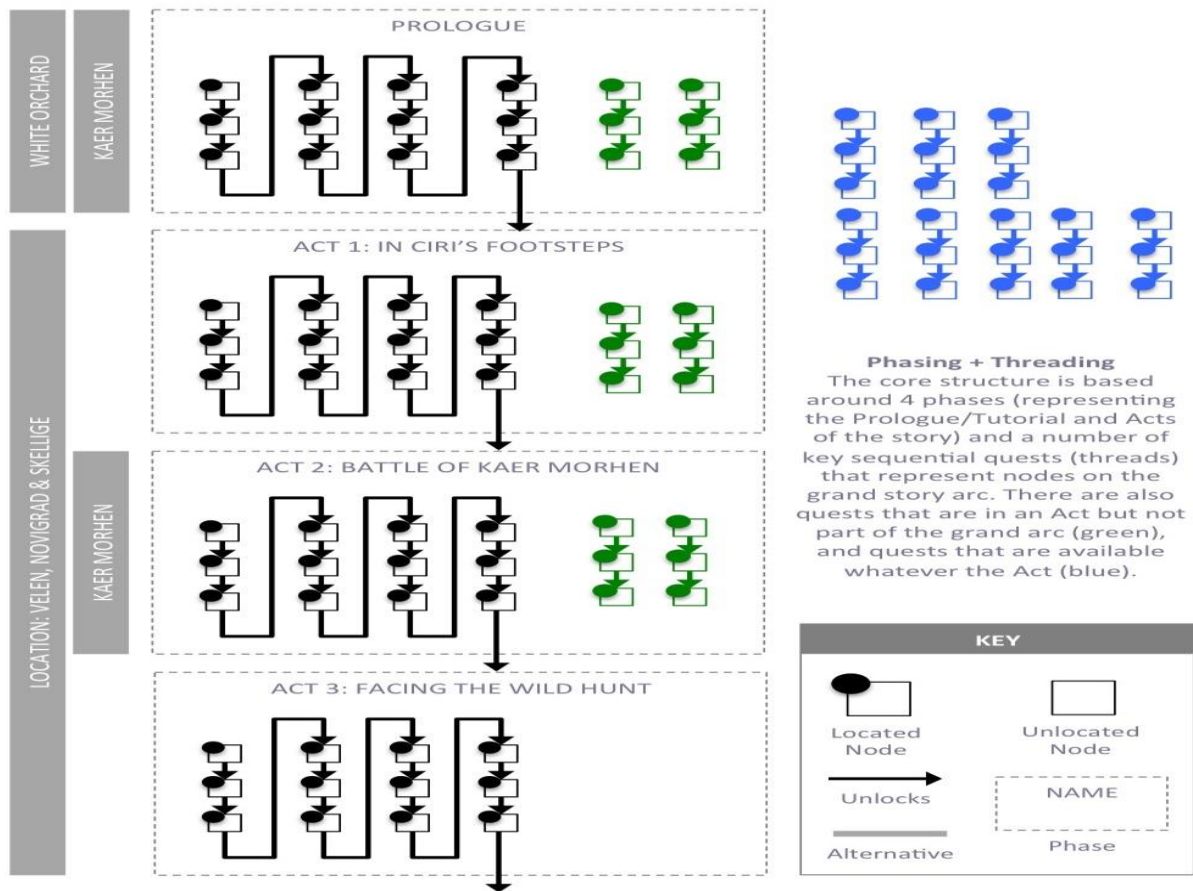


Figure 8: An example of the branching narrative of *the Witcher 3* (Millard, *The Narrative Structure of The Witcher 3*)

Interactive narrative systems essentially over throw the full control of the author over the course of the plot and give an extent of that power to the consumer. To illustrate, in *the Witcher* book series, Geralt and Yennefer are bound by destiny and a wish to be

together and the reader has no saying in the matter. This is exactly what the medium eradicates. In *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, exist a quest entitled “The Last Wish”, similar to the short story “The Last Wish” found in the collection of Andrzej Sapkowski’s book *The Last Wish*, wherein Geralt and Yennefer get their paths intertwined by the Djinn after Geralt’s wish. As if to criticize that, the game introduced the quest where Yennefer asks for Geralt’s help to track down another Djinn, but this time, instead of aligning their paths together, Yennefer asks Geralt to wish for the

Djinn to undo the spell to see if their love will still persist. After locating and finding the seal, the characters engage in a fierce battle with the djinn, resulting in the lifting of the spell. The player then, and based on his subjective experience with the character of Yennefer, who can be dulled out, has the option to continue loving Yennefer, or refrain from doing so.



Figure 9: The player choosing to continue Geralt and Yennefer’s romance or to break it. (xLetalis)

Even though the game acknowledges Geralt’s character by offering the player options that adhere to his personality, it also acknowledge that the player has his own

subjectivity and thus offers him choices that Geralt of Rivia will never do in Sapkowski's world. For instance, not only the player gets the authority of breaking Geralt's beloved sorcerer's heart, he also gets the option to chose an alternative romance with Triss Merigold.

Despite constantly rejecting her attempts in the books, the player has the chance to romanticize Triss Merigold, who appears to have grown from her desperation to be with him. Nevertheless, through the story, the choices the player makes will either leave him with either Yennefer, or Triss as a partner by the end of the story.

Another major part of Geralt's character is his love for his adopted daughter, Ciri. The white-haired witcher went to the edge of the world searching for her and to rescue her. In the game, this is also true; Geralt is eager to find his child of surprise when the news of her appearance reaches him. Nevertheless, it is Emhyr var Emreis, the emperor of Nilfgaard and Ciri's biological father who tasks him with finding her. After finding her, however, the player has the choice to either bring her back to him, or escape with her. If the player chooses the former, the two head to meet him, wherein Geralt is offered the coins the emperor promised the Witcher if he brought back Ciri. The player then has to make yet another quick descion of either refusing, or taking the coin and essentially selling his adopted daughter, which means everything to him. Given the fact that coin is an important part in the game for the player to be able to craft and upgrade armor and purchase other valuables, a player with no idea of the depth the relationship of Geralt and Ciri holds might see the coins as more important.



Figure 10: Geralt has to make a decision of whether to take the coin or reject it (xLetalis).

Figure 10 shows that the game pressures the player to make choices within a limited time frame. By doing so, the game adapts one of the key themes of the Polish author's features; that of having to make morally ambiguous decisions without knowing what they will represent in the grand scheme of the narrative. What this does is take the player from being a passive spectator and sympathizer to the main subject that experiences what Geralt is going through i.e., becoming the protagonist. For instance, the feeling of seeing the Witcher being cursed and treated like an outcaste monster will turn from sympathy to empathy as players step into Geralt's shoes and directly experience his challenges. They will feel a deeper connection to the character, understanding his pain and isolation on a personal level. This transformation of perspective, from a passive observer to an active participant, enhances the immersion and emotional impact of the game. Through player agency, the consumer will choose what action to take in the face of such oppression and discrimination.



Figure 11: Geralt being discriminated, while having three options to choose from: taking the challenge head on, de-ascelating, or using one of the magical signs to hypnotize the mobsters.

There are countless occasions where the player has the option to act according to his own subjective nature which will allow him to blur the line between himself and the playable character of Geralt of Rivia. This level of player agency extends beyond just decision-making and into the realm of customization. The game provides extensive options for players to customize their version of Geralt, from choosing his appearance and clothing to selecting his skills and abilities. By allowing players to shape Geralt's physical appearance and tailor his abilities to their liking, the line between the player and the character becomes further blurred. This customization enhances the player's sense of ownership and investment in the narrative, fostering a deeper connection between themselves and Geralt as they navigate the richly detailed world of *The Witcher*.

3.6 Blurring Boundaries: The Power of Customization in *The Witcher* - Bridging The Gap Between Player And Geralt Of Rivia

In the immersive world of *The Witcher*, players embark on a captivating journey through a realm filled with monsters, magic, and moral dilemmas. Central to this experience is the remarkable ability for players to shape the destiny of Geralt of Rivia, the iconic protagonist. Beyond simply following the narrative, players are given the extraordinary power of customization, allowing them to mold Geralt according to their own preferences and beliefs. This not only blurs the boundaries between player and character, but also enhances the overall gaming experience.

3.6.1 Facial hair

Starting from facial hair, in the books, Geralt's hair is described as long and tied with a band, "had hair as white as milk, tied back from his forehead with a leather band" (Sapkowski 287). In terms of his beard, Geralt always keeps it clean shaved. When he spent some time in the wild and could not shave it, he stated that it bothered him and immediately asked Dandelion for a razor upon seeing him, "Lend it to me tomorrow morning. This beard of mine is driving me insane." (188). In the game the player gets to choose the style of Geralt's hair and beard. The game allows players to customize Geralt's appearance, including his hair length and facial hair. Players can opt for a variety of hairstyles, ranging from short and neat to long and flowing. Similarly, they can decide whether Geralt sports a clean-shaven look or a rugged, stubbled beard.



Figure 12: A list of hairstyles which the player can choose from.

This level of customization in the game allows players to personalize Geralt's appearance according to their preferences. It gives them the freedom to create a version of Geralt that aligns with their vision of the character. Whether they prefer a more traditional portrayal, mirroring the description in the books, or a unique and personalized style, the choice is in their hands.

3.6.2 Armor and Weapons

In the book *The Time of Contempt*, Geralt is described “wearing a silver-studded leather jacket and high boots. The pommel of the sword slung across his back glistened over his right shoulder.” (Sapkowski 34). Despite possessing two swords, silver and steel, in the book Geralt only carries one on his back, unlike the game where he carries two at the same time.

The customization system in *The Witcher 3* allows players to shape Geralt's appearance and armament according to their liking. It offers a diverse range of armors, each with distinct properties and visual designs, enabling players to create a unique representation of Geralt's persona. Likewise, a vast selection of weapons, including swords, axes, and crossbows, can be customized and upgraded to suit different combat scenarios, providing players with the means to adapt their playstyle to the challenges they encounter. By delving into Geralt's inventory and utilizing the game's crafting and alchemy

mechanics, players can further enhance their armor and weapons, forging a truly personalized arsenal. Due to the massive amount of armory and weapons in the game, it is rare to find two players that share the same customized Geralt. As such, every player is turned into his unique Witcher.



Figure 13: A list of hairstyles which the player can choose from.

One aspect which makes the game more interesting is that its mechanics are designed to progress through an evolving system of levels that require players to upgrade their armor and weapons continuously as they face increasingly challenging enemies. This creates a dynamic experience where one must adapt to maintain a competitive edge against stronger and more resilient adversaries throughout the game. To stay ahead, investing in gear upgrades is key. One of the game's rarest swords is Aerdriecht which is a reference to the Arthurian legendary sword of Lancelot bestowed upon him by the lady of the lake.

In *The Witcher 3: Blood and Wine*¹⁵, players must embark on the secondary quest “There Can Only Be One” in the region of Toussaint. The sword itself is reminiscent of Excalibur, the legendary sword of King Arthur. In the Arthurian tales, Excalibur could only be wielded by the worthiest and most chivalric individual. Similarly, in the game, players must prove their worthiness by embodying chivalric virtues such as generosity, compassion, valor, honor, and wisdom, which are central themes in the Arthurian legend. The presence of the Lady of the Lake, who grants the sword upon completing the challenges, further reflects the Arthurian mythos, as she is a significant figure associated with Arthurian lore and the bestowal of magical artifacts.



Figure 14: The lady of the lake emerging from water to give Geralt Aerondight.

The combat system in *The Witcher 3* is a standout feature that immerses players in exciting and strategic battles against various opponents. It combines the fluidity of swordplay, magical powers, and decision-making elements to create an engaging gameplay experience.

¹⁵ An expansion to the *Witcher 3 : Wild Hunt*

3.6.3 The Combat System

One remarkable aspect of *The Witcher 3*'s combat lies in its revamped parrying and counter-attack mechanics. These mechanics have been finely tuned to provide a seamless and fluid combat experience, allowing players to execute precise and well-timed actions that mirror their intentions. By successfully parrying and counter-attacking, players witness their character flawlessly execute these moves, creating a strong sense of synergy between player and character.

The distinction between battling human adversaries and formidable monsters further reinforces the bond between player and character in *The Witcher 3*'s combat. Players must strategically adapt their tactics based on the enemy type, requiring them to think and act like their in-game counterpart. Whether it involves using agile maneuvers against human foes or employing specialized signs and abilities against monstrous creatures, players experience a deep connection to their character's decision-making process, blurring the line between themselves and the virtual world.

Within the skill tree, players have the freedom to choose and unlock various upgrades and enhancements that directly impact their character's combat prowess. This level of control empowers players to tailor their character's skills and attributes to align with their preferred approach to battles. Whether they desire to focus on fast and agile attacks, powerful magic spells, or defensive maneuvers, the skill tree provides a diverse range of options to cater to different playstyles. By investing experience points gained through gameplay into specific skills and abilities, players witness the tangible growth and development of their character's combat prowess. This progression not only rewards the player's efforts but also deepens their connection to the character as they witness firsthand the fruits of their choices and investments. The skill tree acts as a conduit for the player's agency, allowing them to mold the character's capabilities and strengths to align with their own desired play style.



Figure 13: The intricate skill tree in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*

The combat in *The Witcher 3* immerses players in thrilling battles, providing a sense of skill and control. However, it is the game's multiple endings that truly captivate, as each choice made throughout the narrative carries weight and leads to distinct conclusions. These endings bring a sense of closure, highlighting the impact of player decisions and solidifying *The Witcher 3* as a masterfully crafted story.

3.7 Destiny's Crossroads: Exploring the Diverse Endings of *The Witcher 3 : Wild Hunt*

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt offers players a captivating narrative experience with three distinct endings. However, what sets this game apart is its exceptional re-playability. The numerous choices available and their consequences lead to a wide range of different outcomes. These endings not only provide satisfying resolutions but also evoke strong emotional investment and subjectivity due to the blurred line between player and protagonist.

In this morally complex world, the different endings of the game are influenced by the player's personal decisions and emotional connection to the characters and story. The

player's ability to shape the main character's fate creates a sense of ownership and personal investment in the outcomes. The game's challenging quests force players to make tough moral choices, further immersing them in the narrative and forming strong emotional bonds with the characters.

In *The Witcher 3*, the outcome of the game's story and the fates of key characters, particularly Ciri, Geralt's surrogate daughter, are heavily influenced by the accumulation of positive and negative points obtained through various interactions and actions during gameplay.

One significant set of decisions impacting the ending points arises during the "Blood on the Battlefield" quest. Players can earn positive points by providing emotional support to Ciri, for instance, by saying encouraging words like "I know what might lift your spirits." Conversely, negative points can be accrued by dismissing her feelings with comments like "Relax, you don't have to be good at everything." Another crucial decision revolves around whether to take Ciri to meet her father, Emhyr. Refusing payment during this encounter results in positive points, while accepting payment yields negative points, influencing the path leading to different endings.

In the "Final Preparations" quest, players can earn points by letting Ciri have private conversations with characters like Phillipa and Rita, but accompanying her during these interactions will result in negative points. The "Child of the Elder Blood" quest also has moments that affect the ending points. Supporting Ciri's decisions and encouraging her will give positive points, while showing restraint and calming her down will give negative points. Visiting Skjall's grave after the lab part of the quest gives positive points, but skipping the visit gives negative points. The three available endings are: The tragic ending, Empress Ending, and The Witcher Ending.

The tragic ending is a poignant and heart-wrenching outcome where Ciri, Geralt's surrogate daughter, falls victim to the game's events. Overwhelmed by grief, Geralt

embarks on a vengeful mission, finding solace in preserving Ciri's medallion while surrounded by encroaching monsters. This ending showcases Geralt's profound sorrow and the sacrifices he is willing to make for his loved ones.

In contrast, the empress ending takes a different narrative path. By accompanying Ciri to meet her father, Emhyr, and if Nilfgaard emerges victorious in the ongoing war, Ciri assumes the role of empress. This ending requires players to accumulate positive points throughout the game. The narrative unfolds through bittersweet moments as Ciri expresses her desire to bring positive change to the world through her newfound position of power.

Lastly, *the Witcher* ending offers a glimmer of hope and liberation. To achieve this outcome, players must accumulate positive points and choose not to take Ciri to meet Emhyr. Initially solemn, this ending takes an unexpected turn when Geralt encounters a vibrant Ciri in a village inn. Alive and determined, Ciri embraces her destiny as a Witcher, symbolizing her autonomy and the freedom to forge her own path.

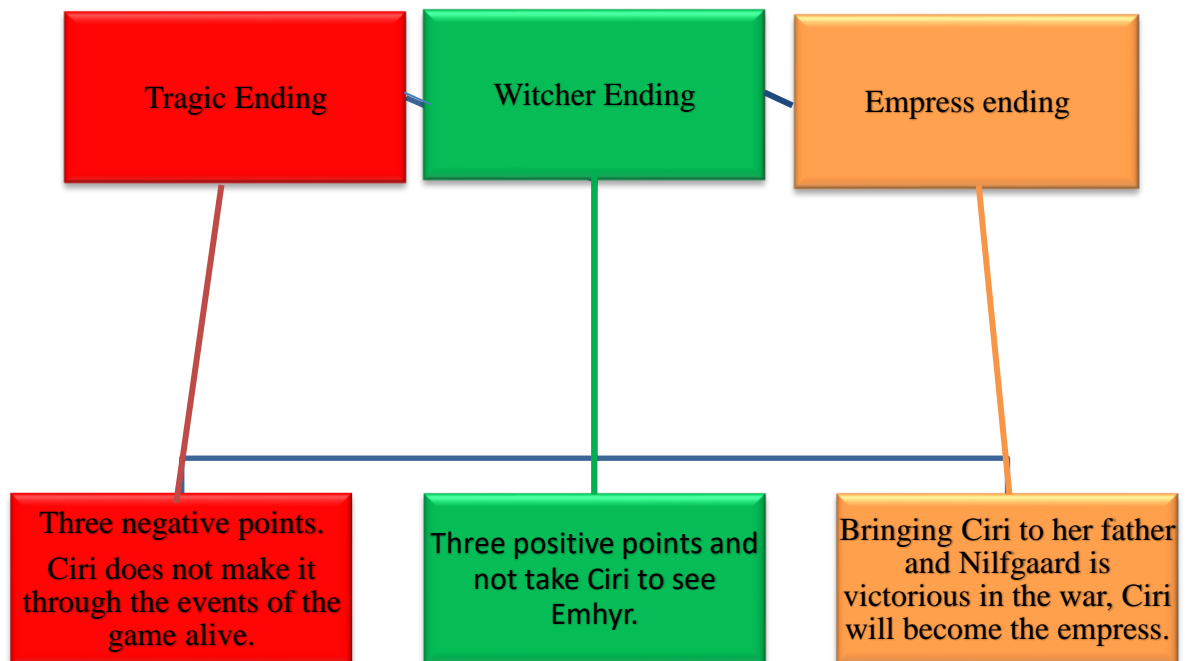


Figure 15: The Witcher 3 Endings Pathway

It is important to note that these three primary endings merely scratch the surface of the game's intricate web of choices and consequences. The player's decisions during quests and interactions with other characters have significant influence over the narrative trajectory, resulting in a multitude of alternative outcomes, character developments, and world-altering events. This extensive variability contributes to the game's exceptional re-playability, enticing players to revisit and uncover the diverse paths and consequences that await them.

In summary, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* offers players a captivating narrative experience with three distinct endings. However, the game's true brilliance lies in its nuanced storytelling and extensive re-playability, thanks to the multitude of choices, emotional investment, and subjective experiences that blur the line between player and protagonist. This confluence of factors fosters a profound connection between the player and the game world, making *The Witcher 3* an exemplary work of interactive storytelling and a testament to the transformative power of video game narratives.

3.8 Conclusion

The tapestry of *the Witcher* is vast and complex. In a world filled with monsters, magic, and other mythical creatures, Sapkowski managed to establish sensible and rational rules rather than purely fantastical ones. With characters that are grounded in reality and defy genre clichés, it becomes easier to relate to and sympathize with them. In CD Projekt Red's adaptation, these relatable characters can become even more identifiable through the nature of video games as a medium, granting players a degree of autonomy and authorship in directing the narrative according to their own accord. By blurring the line between Geralt and the player, the latter becomes an active participant in the story's events. This experience, characterized by subjectivity, results in a deeper emotional attachment and investment in the story. Sometimes players become so immersed that they forget they are in a virtual world.

After finishing a captivating story, readers are often left with a sense of emptiness, as if something is missing in their lives. This feeling may be attributed to returning to the real world after being immersed in a fictional one for too long. Readers are then compelled to wait for the author's next work or reread the story, hoping to experience a similar joy, even though the resolution remains expected. In the case of video games that operate on a similar structure to *The Witcher* series, the potential for re-playability is immense. Not only can the ending vary, but even the dialogues, decisions, and encounters can be different, providing the same thrill and excitement as experiencing the story for the first time.

The Witcher series, both in its original written form and its video game adaptation, demonstrates the remarkable ability of relatable characters and immersive storytelling to leave a lasting impact. With its grounded world, defied genre clichés, and the potential for personal agency, it offers readers and players an unforgettable journey into a realm where fantasy meets reality. Through the power of storytelling, *The Witcher* invites us to get lost in its captivating narrative, fostering a deep emotional connection that lingers even after the final page is turned or the game is completed.

General Conclusion

In conclusion, this research dissertation sought to highlight the importance of postmodernism in paving the way for video games to flourish as a storytelling medium. By disregarding the notion of one objective truth, the door for subjectivity was opened. The dissertation underscored the importance of this subjectivity in creating meaningful and emotionally impactful stories that resonate with the reader. This is done by crafting life-like characters which mirror's the readers experiences. The relatability these characters provide for the reader create a heightened sense of immersion and investment into the story. Through taking *the Witcher* book series as the case study, it becomes apparent that a story can still be relatable despite the fantastical settings of the story, as long as it is grounded in reality. Similarly, through an extensive analysis of *the Witcher* video games, particularly *Wild Hunt*, the potential of video games as a medium to enhance the relatability and immersion of an already identifiable story becomes evident. By granting players agency, interactivity, and character customization options, these games amplify the player's emotional connection to the narrative.

A key finding of this research underscores the significance of characters in establishing a profound emotional bond with readers/players. The characters are the driving force which brings the narrative to life, carrying its themes, conflicts, and moral dilemmas. In a way, they are a reflection of the consumers, they see a glimpse of themselves in the experiences they go through and both identify and sympathize with it. Characters within a video game have the potential to turn that glimpse into a full fledged projection. The player assumes the role of the protagonist, in a sense he is subjected to the events of the story. Elements of customization and interactivity blur the line between the player and character fostering a deep sense of empathy between the two. As such, the emotional investment and impact of the story is strengthened to that of real life.

In the case of *the witcher*, the player gets to experience the weight of the moral choices Geralt of Rivia has to make within a limited time frame. The player is confronted

with complex moral dilemmas, where there are no clear-cut right or wrong choices, but rather shades of gray that reflect the complexity of the real world. This nuanced approach to morality allows players to explore the consequences of their decisions and witness the far-reaching impacts of their actions. By also customizing Geralt appearance, abilities, and relationships, a sense of ownership and investment in the character's journey is created. Moreover, the faithfulness to the source material gave birth to one of the most captivating open worlds in video games, where the player is able to roam free and explore Sapkowski's creation come to life. From the dense forests of Velen to the bustling streets of Novigrad, every corner of the game world exudes attention to detail and a sense of authenticity that truly immerses the player in *the Witcher* universe.

With the new wave of artificial intelligence taking the world by storm, its potential to be incorporated in video games is just a matter of time. In fact, many games are already in experimental stages. This addition will be revolutionary in eliminating one of the most criticized aspects of video games, that of the player following a predestined path. By incorporating artificial intelligence, scenarios and outcomes will be generated in real time based on the input, and interaction of the player, as such, the line between reality, and virtual reality will be further blurred. In terms of characters, AI integration in video games revolutionizes the behavior of NPCs, granting them unique goals, motivations, and personalities. These AI-driven characters transcend scripted paths, fostering immersive player-NPC interactions. Endless possibilities await the player as meaningful conversations, relationships, and interconnected story arcs emerge, enhancing their journey.

Works Cited

• Primary Sources

CD Projekt Red. *The Witcher*. Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2007. Computer software.

CD Projekt Red. *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*. Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2011. Computer software.

CD Projekt Red. *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2015. Computer software.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Last Wish*, Ostatnie życzenie. London: Gollancz, 2007, Pdf.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Sword of Destiny*. New York: Orbit, 2015. Pdf.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Blood of Elves*. New York: Orbit, 2009. Pdf.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Time of Contempt*. New York: Orbit, 2013. Pdf.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *Baptism of Fire*. New York: Orbit, 2014. Pdf.

Sapkowski, Andrzej. *The Lady of the Lake*. New York: Orbit, 2017, pdf

• Secondary Sources

Abshavi, M., & Taghvaei, M. “Avoiding Closure” and “Postmodern Temporality” in Barth’s “On with the Story.” *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 5(4) (2017): 135-140.

Andrews, Richard J. *Metagames: Postmodern Narrative and Agency in the Video Games of Davey Wreden*. Master’s Thesis. The University of Southern Mississippi, 2017: 52 pages. The Aquila Digital Community. Web. Accessed 21 April. Available at: https://aquila.usm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1473&context=honors_theses.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Los Angeles, 1983. ePub.

Baldwin, Emma. “Subjective.” Poem Analysis. Accessed 16 March 2023. Available at: <https://poemanalysis.com/definition/subjective/>

Bethinking.org. “Postmodernism and the Question of Identity.” Bethinking.org. Bethinking.org, 31 May 2007. Web. Accessed 22 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.bethinking.org/human-life/postmodernism-and-the-question-of-identity>

“Borderline Personality Disorder.” National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/borderline-personality-disorder#:~:text=This%20loss%20of%20emotional%20control,symptoms%20of%20borderline%20personality%20disorder. , Accessed 9 May 2023.

Corbett, David. *The Art of Character: Creating Memorable Characters for Fiction, Film, and TV*. London Penguin Books, 2013. Pdf.

- Cutali, Dan. "Interview With Andrzej Sapkowski by Daniele Cutali." Sugarpulp, 13 July 2015, sugarpulp.it/en/26893.
- Duignan, Brian. "objectivism". Encyclopedia Britannica, 10 Dec. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/objectivism-philosophy>. Accessed 1 June 2023.
- Ebert, Roger. "Video Games Can Never Be Art: Roger Ebert: Roger Ebert." Roger Ebert, www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/video-games-can-never-be-art. Accessed 17 Apr. 2023.
- Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage Publications, 1991. Pdf.
- Fernandez Vara, Clara. "Postmodernism in Videogame Narratives." Professor Clara Fernandez Vara (2015).
- First We Feast." Bryan Cranston Fully Commits While Eating Spicy Wings, YouTube, 2 Feb. 2023, <https://youtu.be/OXEteCPQcGc>. Accessed 20 May 2023.
- Flisfeder, Matthew. *Postmodern Theory and Blade Runner*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017. Pdf.
- Forbes, Phil. "The Witcher Books and Their Place in Poland's Culture." EXPATSPOLAND, 8 July 2022. Web. Accessed 4 June 2023. Link: www.expatspoland.com/the-witcher-books/
- Glatch, Sean. "Capturing the art of storytelling: Techniques & tips." Writers.com. Available at: writers.com/the-art-of-storytelling (Accessed: April 1, 2023).
- Hicks, Stephen R.C. *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*. Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2014. PDF.
- Hoffman, Rebecca. "Center for Games Impact The Storytelling Series Why the Video Game Comments", Games and Impact. gamesandimpact.org/uncategorized/the-storytelling-series-why-the-video-game/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2023.
- Hoffner, Cynthia, and Kenneth Levine. "Enjoyment of Mediated Fright and Violence: A Meta-Analysis." *Media Psychology*, vol. 7, 2005, pp. 207-237. doi:10.1207/S1532785XMEP0702_5.
- Ionescu, Petru Ștefan. "Modernist Open Endings." *Meridian Critic*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2021, pp. 103-118. Universitatea "Ștefan Cel Mare" Suceava. Web. Accessed 28 May 2023. Link: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1008067>.
- James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn (Editors). *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pdf.
- Jain, Aakanksha. "The Power of Fictional Characters: How They Help Readers Explore the World and Themselves." Books Charming, 27 Feb. 2023, <https://www.bookscharming.com/2023/02/power-of-fictional-characters.html>

- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006. Pdf.
- Kress, Nancy. *Characters, Emotion and Viewpoint: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting Dynamic Characters and Effective Viewpoints*. Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 2005. Pdf.
- "Lady of the Lake." Myth and Folklore Wiki, mythus.fandom.com/wiki/Lady_of_the_Lake.
- Libguides: "Historical Fiction Genre Guide: Appeal Elements." Appeal Elements - Historical Fiction Genre Guide - LibGuides at Simmons College Library and Information Sciences, simmonslibguides.com/historical-fiction-genre-guide/appeal-elements. Accessed 6 May 2023.
- Lindblad, Mason. "Video Games Are an Underappreciated Storytelling Medium." Storify Studio, www.storifystudio.com/post/video-games-underappreciated-storytelling-medium. Accessed 19 June 2023.
- Mengouchi, Meryem. "Aspects of Minor Literature in Kurt Vonnegut's *Sirens of Titan*, *Slapstick or Lonesome no More!* and *Cat's Cradle*." Tlemcen: University of Tlemcen, 2023.
- Messaoudi, Merwan and Soumia I. Medjahed. "Narrative Videogames: The Literary Genre of the Digital Age." Tlemcen: University of Tlemcen, 2018.
- "Metroidvania - English Definition, Grammar, Pronunciation, Synonyms and Examples | Glosbe." Metroidvania - | Glosbe, glosbe.com/en/en/Metroidvania.
- Miles, Steven. "Consumer Culture." In *obo in Sociology*. 4 Jun. 2023. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0135.xml>.
- Millard, David. "David Millard looking around the Eyes, Not in the Eyes." David Millard, 4 Dec. 2016, www.davidmillard.org/2016/12/the-narrative-structure-of-the-witcher-3/
- Mukherjee, Souvik. *Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. Pdf.
- "90 Percent of People Say They Have a Major Regret. Here's How to Move Past It." HuffPost, 26 June 2014, www.huffpost.com/entry/regret-infographic_n_5529641.
- Popoveniuc, Bogdan. "From Modern Closure to Postmodern Openings." *Postmodern Openings*, vol. 8, 2017, pp. 6-10. doi:10.18662/po/2017.0803.01.
- Purchase, Robert. "Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the Writer Who Created the Witcher." Eurogamer.Net, 25 Mar. 2017, www.eurogamer.net/meeting-andrzej-sapkowski-the-writer-who-created-the-witcher.

- Quarneti, Franca. ‘the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt’ Elite Ranks, Benzinga, 1 June 2023, www.benzinga.com/general/gaming/23/06/32659979/the-witcher-3-wild-hunt-joins-elite-ranks-clocks-50-million-sales-the-witcher-4-teased-for-2025.
- Radianti, Jaziar, Tim A. Majchrzak, Jennifer Fromm, and Isabell Wohlgenannt. “A Systematic Review of Immersive Virtual Reality Applications for Higher Education: Design Elements, Lessons Learned, and Research Agenda.” *Computers & Education*. Vol. 147, 2020, pp. 103778. *Computers & Education*. Web. Accessed 19 May 2023. ISSN 0360-1315. DOI: 10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103778.
- Riedl, M. O., and R. M. Young. “From Linear Story Generation to Branching Story Graphs.” *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications*, vol. 26, no. 3, May-June 2006, pp. 23-31. doi: 10.1109/MCG.2006.56.
- Schmidt, Megan. “How Reading Fiction Increases Empathy and Encourages Understanding.” *Discover Magazine*, www.discovermagazine.com/mind/how-reading-fiction-increases-empathy-and-encourages-understanding.
- Shunnarah, Mandy. “On ‘Seeing Yourself’ in Literature.” *Off the Beaten Shelf*, 12 Feb. 2018, www.offthebeatenshell.com/blog/seeing-yourself. Accessed 18 April 2023.
- Sim, Stuart. *The Companion to Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2001. Pdf.
- “Skill Tree.” *YourDictionary*. Accessed 5 Jun 2023. Available at: <https://www.yourdictionary.com/skill-tree>
- “StudySmarter US.” *StudySmarter US*, www.studysmarter.us/explanations/english-literature/literary-devices/intertextuality.
- Thabet, Tamer. *Video Game Narrative and Criticism: Playing the Story*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. Pdf
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984. Pdf.
- “What Is Player Agency? &Mdash; University XP.” *University XP*, 20 Aug. 2020, www.universityxp.com/blog/2020/8/20/what-is-player-agency.
- Wolf, Mark J. *Encyclopedia of Video Games: The Culture, Technology, and Art of Gaming*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2012. Pdf.

Summary: This dissertation explores how storytelling in video games has changed over time and how the artistic movement of postmodernism has affected character development. The focus is on the character Geralt of Rivia from *The Witcher* fantasy novels and how video games enhance his established identity. The research emphasizes the importance of complex characters in engaging players emotionally and analyzes how the video game adaptation by CD Projekt RED allows players to follow the character as portrayed in the books or create their own interpretation. The dissertation compares these approaches to show how they increase player attachment and investment in the character.

Résumé: Cette Thèse explore l'évolution du récit dans les jeux vidéo et l'impact du postmodernisme sur le développement des personnages. Elle se concentre sur Geralt of Rivia, personnage des romans *The Witcher*, et comment les jeux vidéo renforcent son identité. La recherche souligne l'importance des personnages complexes pour engager émotionnellement les joueurs et analyse comment l'adaptation vidéoludique de CD Projekt RED permet aux joueurs de suivre le personnage selon les livres ou de créer leur propre interprétation. La dissertation compare ces approches pour montrer comment elles renforcent l'attachement et l'investissement des joueurs envers le personnage.

ملخص: يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تغيرت رواية القصص في ألعاب الفيديو بمرور الوقت وكيف أثرت الحركة الفنية لما بعد الحداثة على تطور الشخصية. ينصب التركيز على شخصية جيرالت من ريفيا من روايات ويتشر الخيالية وكيف تعزز ألعاب الفيديو هويته الراسخة. يؤكد البحث على أهمية الشخصيات المعقدة في إشراك اللاعبين عاطفياً ويحلل كيف يسمح تكييف لعبة للاعبين بمتابعة الشخصية كما هو موضح في الكتب أو إنشاء تفسيرهم الخاص. تقارن الفيديو بواسطة سي دي بروجيكت ريد الرسالة هذه الأساليب لتوضح كيف تزيد من ارتباط اللاعب والاستثمار في الشخصية.