

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Research

In a time where the boundaries between literature and digital screens have become increasingly blurred, the appeal of narratives no longer resides solely within printed pages; it has spread into the dynamic, interactive worlds of video games. People find new ways and other media to tell their stories in these new and exciting times.

*The Witcher* series, notably *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake*, authored by Andrzej Sapkowski, offers an ideal starting point for examining how storytelling transforms across mediums. It was first introduced as a series of short stories in the 1980s, followed by a film adaptation in 2001 (Larasati). The books follow the story of a fantasy world, with Geralt of Rivia as its main character, a witcher—a mutated creature who undergoes a transformative process by consuming magical elixirs, inducing genetic changes in their body. As a result, they acquire heightened senses, increased reflexes, and enhanced endurance.

Geralt's primary occupation involves traveling and signing contracts to slay dangerous creatures such as monsters, beasts, and supernatural entities. Sapkowski's original written works lay the foundation for a narrative that explores the physical battles with mythical creatures and the intricacies of

human nature, power struggles, and the consequences of choice and destiny. The popularity of his writings has catapulted their adaptation into various mediums.

The transition from novels to video games, exemplified by "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt," developed by CD Projekt Red (stylized as CD PROJEKT RED) in 2015, is the third installment in the "The Witcher" series. In this fantasy-action role-playing game, players control Geralt of Rivia, a witcher tasked with rescuing his adoptive daughter Ciri from the Wild Hunt. Renowned for its stunning visual and intricate narrative, the game shapes the story based on players' choices. These aspects have earned the game its critical acclaim and numerous awards.

Furthermore, the recent adaptation of "The Witcher" into a Netflix series in 2019 presents another example of this narrative evolution. The television medium immerses the audience through visual and auditory engagement. However, the show has received mixed reviews and opinions, with some original books and game fans criticizing the changes made to the source material (Fenn). Despite this, the series has become popular and shows how stories can be adapted across diverse media formats while still pulling in audiences worldwide.

Adaptation is a complex process involving creative transformation and interpretation of existing works. It alters the form, effectively avoiding legal

consequences, while the essence of the content remains unchanged (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 10). In this way, adaptation emerges as a unique and distinct entity with character.

Additionally, adaptation extends beyond a simple reproduction; it engages interactively with the original work, offering reinterpretations and fresh perspectives. The adaptative process requires a balance between faithfulness to the source material, homage, and creative freedom. As a result, adaptations serve as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling, offering a repackaged narrative in a different medium where audiences can view familiar stories with renewed insight and appreciation.

We have always tended to adapt stories from various sources, and these adaptations moved freely between different mediums. This results in adaptation becoming widespread, and understanding its appeal and characteristics requires more than simply examining novels and movies, we also need to look at digital medias such as video games. Bolter and Grusin propose that digital media, including video games, frequently draw heavily from one another and older analog forms like film, television, and photography (qtd. in King and Krzywinska 4). This "borrowing" happens both ways; cinematic aspects inspire games, and movies also draw inspiration from video games.

Exploring adaptation in literature has undergone significant evolution, such as debates on the responsibilities that adaptations bear to their source texts and fidelity and adherence to their source material. Some argue that adaptations should honor the integrity of the original, striving to remain faithful to its core themes, characters, and plotlines. In contrast, others advocate for evaluating adaptations based solely on merit rather than how closely they stick to the original work, emphasizing creative freedom and the possibility of reinterpreting the source material to suit new contexts or mediums. This separation raises questions about the nature of storytelling and the relationship between original works and their adapted forms.

Although the debate over the superiority of literature compared to its adaptations persists among experts, the number of adaptations continues to rise. It indicates how time and technology changed the preferences of the audience and the ways stories are consumed and interpreted in contemporary culture. Hutcheon and O'Flynn remark that "repetition with variation" and financial appeal attract people to adaptations, suggesting that familiar stories with nuanced changes and the potential of financial success contribute to the enduring popularity of adaptations (4-5).

## 1.2 Identification of the Problem

The adaptation of "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" video game from Sapkowski's *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake* introduces

multiple challenges. The main problem lies in understanding how the transition from literature to an interactive digital medium impacts the narrative evolution of storytelling elements, such as character development, plot intricacies, and overall narrative structure. The adaptation process raises questions about fidelity to the source material and how the video game medium's unique characteristics, including player agency and interactivity, contribute to the narrative evolution.

This thesis will comprehensively study narrative evolution by comparing storytelling techniques in Andrzej Sapkowski's original writings, *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake*, with "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" video game. The writer will apply fidelity and narrative criticism to analyze how the game's narrative aligns with or diverges from the source material and the impact of player agency on the narrative. Through this approach, the study aims to offer insights into the evolution of narrative across different mediums.

### 1.3 The Scope of the Research

The writer limits the discussion to the factors influencing narrative alignment or divergence between the two mediums and the impact on the overall narrative evolution of "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" video game and Sapkowski's writings, specifically *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake*. The thesis seeks to uncover the fidelity, adaptation constraints, and player agency in shaping narrative evolution, providing an understanding of

how storytelling transforms across the two different mediums. The significance of this thesis lies in improving our understanding of adaptation studies, particularly video games.

#### 1.4 Questions of the Research

1. How does Sapkowski present the narrative in the game, and whether does the narrative presented in "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" diverge from or align with Andrzej Sapkowski's novels, specifically *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake*, and what impact does this have on the overall narrative evolution?
2. How do the narrative choices and player agency in "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" influence the narrative evolution in the game as an adaptation of Andrzej Sapkowski's books, *The Tower of Swallows* and *The Lady of the Lake*?

#### 1.5 The Objective of the Research

The research aims to understand the factors influencing narrative alignment or divergence between the video game and novels and the subsequent impact on the overall narrative evolution. Additionally, the study in this thesis seeks to reveal how player agency in video games influences the narrative's evolution as adapted from the books. The writer identifies and analyzes the elements contributing to those two factors.



## 1.6 The Review of the Previous Studies

Sławomir Gawroński and Kinga Bajorek's article entitled "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series? In the Circle of Multimedia Adaptations of a Fantasy Series of Novels "The Witcher" by A. Sapkowski" (2020) provides valuable insights into the writer's topic. Specifically, it discusses the evolution and impact of "The Witcher" novels on mainstream popular culture, mainly through film and multimedia adaptations, including computer games. It highlights the transformation of Sapkowski's literary work into a global phenomenon and its significant role in contributing to Polish national pride, especially with the success of the Netflix production. The focus on the dissonance between the Slavic and universal dimensions of "The Witcher" concerning the original novels and their various adaptations aligns with the broader discourse on the adaptability of literature and its repercussions on audience reception. The article explores the consequences of the adaptation process, not only in terms of typology but also by addressing questions about the impact of the disparities between the original books and their adaptations in the forms of film, TV series, and computer games.

The writer has identified another research article that is relevant to the topic at hand. Violetta Evallyo's article "Transformations of the Other's Image in Transmedia Discussion on the Example of The Witcher" (2021) explores

the portrayal of "The Witcher" in various transmedia works. The study aims to analyze the emphasis placed by creators on different aspects of the story and compare the presented themes across these diverse media forms. The central focus revolves around the temporal and spatial dimensions, investigating how the witcher's image transforms visual and aesthetic representations. The article notes the themes of destiny, choice, and the good/evil dichotomy as recurring elements in transmedia adaptations of "The Witcher" saga.

A thesis proven useful is from Anna Michalska, entitled *Otherness and Intertextuality in The Witcher. The Duality of Experiencing Andrzej Sapkowski's Universe* (2020). This study investigates the duality of the morally ambiguous main character, Geralt, a "no-hero," which aligns with exploring narrative complexity and interactive elements in the writer's research. Additionally, the analysis of the saga's Slavic folklore and its blend with Western anti-fairytales sheds light on the cultural and literary aspects that contribute to the narrative evolution, providing insights into the unique storytelling elements in both the books and adaptations. The investigation of native and international reactions to the Netflix show further complements the writer's focus on narrative evolution, showcasing how different audiences engage with and interpret the narrative across various media.

Mikael Häkki from the University of Oulu wrote his master's thesis, *Adapting the Witcher – an analysis of transmedial storyworld building* (2022),



which focuses on understanding the adaptation process, with the mentioned thesis delving specifically into the video game adaptation of the books. The theoretical basis, incorporating ludology, narratology, and adaptation theory, provides a framework for comprehensively analyzing how the video game adapts elements from the source material.

Stephen Joyce's article titled "Video Games in Transmedia Storyworlds: The Witcher and the Mothership Problem" (2023) introduces the idea of a "dual industrial core" transmedia model, where both the video game and the TV adaptation play central roles, challenging the conventional "mothership" model. It offers a lens through which to analyze how storytelling elements may vary across different mediums within The Witcher franchise, contributing to the broader discourse on narrative evolution and transmedia storytelling.

Lastly, an article from a conference proceeding authored by Selis Yildiz Sen titled "The Evolution of Geralt of Rivia The Witcher Through Mediums" (2023) looks into the transformative journey of Geralt of Rivia, the protagonist of Sapkowski's The Witcher series, as is adapted across different mediums. The paper underlines the dynamic nature of Geralt's identity, which is influenced by adaptation practices and the audience's active participation.