Geralt of Rivia as a Byronic Hero

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Geralt iz Rivije kao bajronovski junak

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Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Abstract

Initially published in Polish, *Sword of Destiny* (1992) and *The Last Wish* (1993) are two novels created by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski that collectively form the foundation of the Witcher series of novels. The novels follow the journey of Geralt of Rivia, a renowned monster hunter known as the Witcher, as he explores a morally ambiguous world filled with political strife and supernatural phenomena and dangers. On this journey, Geralt faces the challenges of his profession, including the notions of societal prejudice and moral dilemmas, pervasive issues both in the literary era of Romanticism and today. *The Last Wish* and *Sword of Destiny* had a significant impact on popular culture, serving as inspiration for the critically acclaimed video game adaptation series, starting with *The Witcher* (2007). Fantasy characters serve as blueprints for compelling video game protagonists, breathing life into interactive narratives. As the paper will show, the literary Geralt embodies the Byronic hero archetype, whereas the video game Geralt, embraces some and rejects other qualities of the Byronic hero archetype, resulting in a complex, atypical character that corresponds with contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Geralt of Rivia, Andrzej Sapkowski, Byronic hero, fantasy fiction, role-playing games, adaptation, visual media.

Contents

Introduction

The realm of literature has long existed as a playground for the imaginative, where archetypal figures and fantastical settings blend to craft narratives that captivate and resonate with readers. These narratives are not fixed in form; they evolve according to the changing tides of time and technology. The advent of role-playing games and their role in the adaptation of fantastical realms of fiction into interactive digital landscapes have heralded a new era in storytelling; one where readers become active participants in the narrative. With this participation, readers turn into players, blurring the lines of observer and protagonist, embodying characters of their choosing. One such character and the focus of this paper is Geralt of Rivia, a modern take on the anti-hero and Byronic hero character type. This paper intends to show that Geralt of Rivia is an atypical example of a Byronic hero by analysing his representation in the literary medium, on the example of two novels by Andrzej Sapkowski, *The Last Wish* (1993) and *Sword of Destiny* (1992), and the medium of videogames, on the example of the first video game adaptation titled *The Witcher* (2007).

The first chapter of this paper offers a historical overview of the creation and origins of the Byronic hero during the Romantic period. The aim is to provide insight into Lord Byron's works as well as provide a survey of the Romantic literary movement of the nineteenth century, the social and cultural context of which impacted the development of the Byronic hero archetype. An additional aim of the chapter is to explicate the typical characteristics of such characters and to detail their evolution in later literary periods.

The following chapter will define role-playing games and the importance of the characters' roles in them. The aim is to shed light on the notion of immersion as well as discuss the use of fantastic elements in interactive storytelling as a mirror of the real world. In addition, the chapter will discuss the tendency of video game creators to adapt literary texts to create video games.

The third chapter of the paper will focus on the character of Geralt of Rivia, examining his lineage and portrayal in the literary format and visual adaptation. The aim is to distinguish various aspects of his character following his development in the first two novels and the first video game and to explicate his (a)typical embodiment of the Byronic hero archetype. An additional goal of the chapter is to provide a comparative character analysis, discussing the differences between the literary depiction and the visual representation of Geralt of Rivia's character. The paper ends with a Conclusion and the list of bibliographical sources.

1. On Byronic Heroes: Creation and Origins

The history of Byronic heroes is linked to the literary and cultural developments of the Romantic literary movement in the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Byronic heroes are seen as variants of the Romantic hero archetype whose creation and origins are associated with the English Romantic poet Lord Byron. The archetype of the Romantic hero is described as a rebellious "person who refuses to accept any fixed social norms or orders. It is the one who does not accept any mutual agreements with society because he was rejected by it. The most important trait of a Romantic hero is his utmost devotion to himself, perceiving himself as the center of being" ("The Salient Traits"). This character fully aligns with the term Byronic hero, as Byronic heroes are complex and morally ambiguous literary characters who are described as "arrogant, intelligent, educated outcasts, who somehow balance their cynicism and self-destructive tendencies with a mysterious magnetism and attraction, particularly for heroines" ("Glossary of the Gothic: Byronic Hero").

The origins of this character type can be traced back to the appearance of the Gothic, a genre that explored the themes of ruin, decay, death and chaos, and that appeared during Romanticism:

The idea of the *dark hero* in English literature is noticeable even before Lord Gordon Byron, whose name it carries, in Gothic novels and Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* from 1764. The difficulty in defining the *Byronic hero* is partially due to its complex nature: it shows elements of the *Romantic hero* combined with traits of the *Tragic hero* and the Anti-hero characterization of the protagonists in the Gothic novels. Its hybrid constituency makes it even more difficult to define. (Zarieva and Iliev 2)

Byronic heroes exhibit a variety of character traits that had not previously appeared during the period of Romanticism: "The Byronic hero is distinguished by the clearly defined existence of sensuousness and its antithesis, sensitiveness" (Bates 25). The definition of sensuousness describes it "as the quality that affects, or relates to the physical senses, implies a gratification for the sake of aesthetic pleasure" ("Sensuousness"), while sensitiveness, the antithesis to sensuousness, is "the quality of being easily influenced, changed, or damaged, especially by a physical activity or effect" ("Sensitiveness"). Zarieva and Iliev specify that, according to Thorslev, "the literary sensibility of the *noble outlaw* is said to have originated in the effects of the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century which had produced such 'aristocratic rebels against their hereditary class, like Byron's later heroes'" (4).

Bates further implies that all Byronic heroes share common traits of broodiness and otherness: "The mood of the Byronic hero is one of intense melancholy and pessimism; yet we feel underlying this apparently static exterior, the beat of throbbing life energy" (26), as well as social angst: "the Byronic hero is warp'd by the world of disappointment. He seems to loathe himself and all mankind, and is always one apart from his fellow creatures" (Bates 26). To further expand on this social angst and unconformity, it is claimed that a Byronic

hero "is a solitary person from noble origins who is disrespectful of hierarchy and social institutions, or rebels against the whole society" (Zarieva and Iliev 3).

The exclusion of such characters is not imposed by society itself, rather, Byronic heroes often exclude themselves due to their personal differences and inner disdain for the status quo in traditional social dynamics: "They all have in common their abhorrence for society. Often, they are self-exiled" (Zarieva and Iliev 3). Moreover, this self-exile and inner pessimism leads to the belief that the Byronic hero's nature lies in eternal damnation and inability to redeem themselves: "The Byronic hero's *unredeemable nature* and fate is another common characteristic. He possesses self-destructive impulses, suffers and is damned" (Zarieva and Iliev 4). However, there exist differences between classical tragic heroes and Byronic heroes. Unlike tragic heroes, who possess a tragic, internal flaw, or hamartia, a Byronic hero "is merely a tormented melancholy figure, who fails to achieve his goal and experiences eternal loss" (Zarieva and Iliev 5). Another prototypical trait key that all Byronic heroes possess is a preference for exploration and wandering, much like Byron did: "Byron's figure of the *traveller/wanderer* occurs also as a prototypical trait of this character" (Zarieva and Iliev 4). In addition, Byronic heroes are contemplative in nature, much like Romantic heroes: "They are *melancholic brooders* over a past sin or love, the darkness that is inside them. The hell they go through is inside them, in their memory, the past" (Zarieva and Iliev 6).

Byronic heroes are often regarded as precursors to the antihero character type, a modern take on protagonists that are neither heroic nor villainous in the truest sense, as their nature is not one of conventional good or evil: "The Byronic hero's character is amoral rather than immoral" (Bates 26). A Byronic hero's past is often shrouded in a veil of mystery, and is not presented to the reader: "The Byronic hero is always a man with a mysterious past. This

past is usually surmised to be of wickedness and sin, and our hero is periodically haunted by feeling of remorse concerning it" (Bates 25).

1.1. The Romantic Era and Lord Byron

Romanticism refers to an intellectual orientation which is seen as a "rejection of the precepts of order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality that typified Classicism in general and late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism in particular. It was also to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment and against eighteenth-century rationalism and physical materialism in general" ("Romanticism"). The Romantic literary movement emerged in the late eighteenth century and lasted until the mid-nineteenth century, roughly from 1790-1830. Modern critics of the Romantic literary movement claim Romanticism to be a celebration of the power of "the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental" ("Romanticism").

Romanticism offered a deeper understanding of the self, heightening the human personality, passions, and inner struggles whilst shifting focus onto a general exaltation of emotion over reason and senses over intellect. Frye explicates the central distinctive feature of the romantic mode, claiming it to be: "the search for a reconciliation between the inner vision and the outer experience expressed through 'a creative power greater than his own because it includes his own'" (qtd. in Childs and Fowler 209). Wellek adds to the description of the romantic mode claiming that it is: "the synthetic imagination which performs this reconciliation and the vision it produces of a life drawing upon a 'sense of continuity between man and nature and the presence of God'" (qtd. in Childs and Fowler 209). In addition, nature played a pivotal role as the inspiration behind many Romantic literary works, offering a sense of escapism, admiring the beauty, grandeur and sublimity of the natural world. Nature often symbolised the divine or the transcendental, becoming a source of spiritual and emotional renewal, entrancing the individual to rediscover the world and to find purpose:

> The romantic poet seeks a way to reactivate the world by discovering the creative perceptiveness which will allow the writer to draw aside the veils which modern living has laid across the senses and seek a perception where the false separation of Nature (fixed, external objects) and nature (the living beings of the perceiver) can be reconciled, a new synthesizing vision. (Childs and Fowler 209)

Another important characteristic of Romanticism is the inspiration from previous historical works. Romantic literature was deeply influenced by historical events, native folklore, and the medieval past. The interest in the past was linked to a sense of nostalgia and a desire to connect to cultural roots, which resulted in a resurgence of folk ballads and poetry: "This belief leads to a marked historicism, to an increased interest in primitivist theories of culture; to a persistent strain of historical reconstruction in romantic writing, a medieval element in poetry and the novel, and an idealized resurrection of ballad and folk-song" (Childs and Fowler 209). Moreover, poets of the Romantic literary period drew many parallels to Gothic literature, as there existed a preference for the mysterious, the occult, the monstrous, and in some cases the satanic. In his work *Philosophical Enquiry*, Edmund Burke illustrates what makes a Gothic novel and the sublime as one of its integral characteristics: "vast cataracts, raging storms, lofty towers, dark night, ghosts and goblins, serpents, madmen; mountains, precipices, dazzling light; low, tremulous, intermittent sounds, such as moans, sighs, or whispers; immense, gloomy buildings; tyranny, incarceration, torture" (qtd. in Morris 301). Moreover, the grotesque and sublime of the Gothic novel are characterized by a fascination in which "crime escalates into villainy; innocence is never merely virtuous but immaculate and virginal; devils and demigods, imagined or unimagined, mix with giants, ghosts and groaning portraits" (Morris 302).

Lord Byron, a prominent figure in the Romantic literary movement, and the creator of the Byronic hero archetype, also drew inspiration from many Gothic literary works. Byron's

contribution to the Romantic literary period was pivotal as many of his works and characters, such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and *Don Juan*, embodied the brooding and pessimistic spirit of Romanticism, challenging traditional notions of heroism and morality:

> Byron early became aware of reality's imperfections, but the skepticism and cynicism bred of his disillusionment coexisted with a lifelong propensity to seek ideal perfection in all of life's experiences. . . The melancholy of *Childe Harold* and the satiric realism of *Don Juan* are thus two sides of the same coin: the former runs the gamut of the moods of Romantic despair in reaction to life's imperfections, while the latter exhibits the humorous irony attending the unmasking of the hypocritical façade of reality. ("Lord Byron")

Byron was fascinated with the concept of the sublime, the dark, and the terrifying, projecting it into his works in order to evoke strong emotional responses from his readers. Peter Thorslev suggested that the heroic image of Childe Harold, the first Byronic hero "might be found in other places, in Walpole's Manfred, the villain of the first Gothic novel" (qtd. in Novak 62). Byron constructed his works by projecting his often tumultuous and controversial life as a means of social and political commentary.

Moreover, Lord Byron is considered a national hero in Greece due to his outspoken support and participation in the Greek War of Independence. Byron commented on the struggles of the oppressed, the fight for freedom, and the abolishment of tyranny in his poems "The Giaour" and "The Isles of Greece." Byron reimagined himself through his characters, using them as a mask in order to face himself and the issues he perceived in the world: "Many of Byron's masks are famous, Childe Harold being, I suppose, the most famous of them all-and the prototype of those subsequent masked men we call Byronic Heroes" (McGann 1). Byron personified the traveller trait of Byronic heroes, which reflected his wandering persona, as his travels to Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean greatly influenced his works. The exploration

of the exotic and unfamiliar settings and cultures contributed to the Romantic fascination with the distant and the unknown.

As one of the most notable and influential writers and poets of the Romantic era, Byron's legacy lies in the characters he created, the exploration of intense emotions, and his engagement with various socio-political and introspective themes which influenced many other Romantic and writers of subsequent literary eras, such as Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, and Edgar Allan Poe. The archetype of the Byronic hero is a pervasive figure in popular culture nowadays: "As our world of technology has evolved, and fiction has adapted into new media, the Byronic figure has continued to be a presence in theatre musicals, films, and television" (Frazell 3).

1.2. The Evolution of the Byronic Hero Archetype

The Byronic hero archetype evolved and adapted over time, following various social and cultural developments. Though the archetype was originally created and popularised by Lord Byron during the Romantic era, it continued to exist through an assortment of diverse and reimagined forms in subsequent literary periods. During the Victorian era, the Byronic hero archetype persisted and was adapted to align with the values and moral sensibilities of the period. According to Brown, the Brontë sisters of the Victorian era were deeply influenced by Lord Byron, creating the Byronic hero figures of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, and Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Unlike Byron's characters, the Brontë sisters' characters were often a subject of moral redemption or transformation. Brown implies that Byron was an important figure in the Brontë sisters' childhood:

> There is no doubt that Byron was read at the Parsonage, for in 1834 Charlotte recommended him to Ellen Nussey, . . . and both Charlotte and Branwell quote him. Emily does not quote directly either Byron or any other writer, but there are resemblances between her poems and some passages of Byron so startling

that they can only be accounted for by supposing her to have read him. (Brown 375)

Popular reinterpretations of the Byronic hero archetype occur in various works of fantasy fiction literature, as their moral complexity and ambiguity are well-suited to the mysterious worlds of fantasy. Fantasy literature is defined as "imaginative fiction dependent for effect on strangeness of setting (such as other worlds or times) and of characters (such as supernatural or unnatural beings)" ("Fantasy"). Fantasy fiction often defies clear boundaries as it can overlap with other literary genres. Many contemporary critics "essentially take the view that any text which has elements that would usually be considered outside the bounds of 'normal' experience, in other, words, any text with fantastic elements, can fall under the category of fantasy" (Rayment 1). Fantasy fiction carries parts of deliberations and ideals of the Romantic mode; the introspective, rebellious, self-creating and self-perceiving generate almost fantasy-like views of the world: "Personal, private fantasy allows us to speculate, to explore possibilities, to indulge our private selves – to consider imaginatively things that cannot be. . ." (Hunt and Lenz 2). In addition, modern fantasy fiction draws also inspiration from previous historical literary works and myths: "The domain of modern fantasy is related to a long history of myth, legend, folk-tale and wonder tale, not to mention religion and the occult – form of narrative which many have seen as expressions of, or as being closely related to, deep and universal human drives" (Hunt and Lenz 8). Deep and universal human drives are the very subject of exploration in Gothic and Romantic literature. It can be argued that the darkness and otherness in human nature, the demonization of Gothic and Romantic protagonists, is what characterises them as compelling. Many fantasy fiction characters challenge the social norms of alternate-world societies and become outcasts thrown on a path of self-redemption or on a quest to protect those societies and the status quo.

In the subgenre of dark fantasy, protagonists often exist in grim and morally obscure worlds where the lines between good and evil are shifted, and the hero-villain roles are in opposition. The subgenre of dark fantasy is "characterized by borderline horror aspects that are dark, gritty, and create a gloomy world and aesthetic. However, it is distinctive from horror in the sense that the main aim of the writing is not to scare the reader" (Reed). Kentaro Miura's manga series *Berserk* and Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* are prime examples that contain such settings and morally disfigured characters. The reoccurrence of the Byronic hero archetype is also found in high-fantasy epics, such as the characters of Elric of Melniboné in Michael Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* series, Ged in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* series, or Jorg Ancrath in Mark Lawrence's *The Broken Empire* series.

2. Role-Playing Games and Adaptation of Fantasy Fiction into Video Games

Role-playing is a form of interactive storytelling, where individuals assume the roles of various characters in order to collaboratively create fictional and imaginative narratives with a diverse array of arbitrary rules, values and ideals; a more general definition is that it is "an activity in which people do and say things while pretending to be someone else or while pretending to be in a particular situation" ("Role-Play Definition and Meaning"). In singular role-playing, an individual assumes the role of a character who perceives the world from a distinct viewpoint; the individual thinks, speaks, and forms decisions as if they were the character themselves. In collaborative role-playing, each of the participants dictates the outcome and consequences of the unfolding narrative; there is a high degree of narrative freedom, and each of the participants responds differently to specific situations, tackling conflict and challenges in both the real and imaginative world. Role-playing takes on many forms, including tabletop role-playing games, live-action role-playing and single-player or multiplayer role-playing video games.

The concept of roles is a prevalent factor that dictates the context of a society and its social dynamics. Owens et al. further expand on the connection between role and identity and their impact: "We define role-identity as a social position a person holds in a larger social structure, considers self-descriptive, and enacts in a role relationship with at least one other person" (Owens et al. 479). Roles are an integral part of self-description and self-actualization in society: "Because it is self-descriptive and internalized, it becomes part of one's self-concept. Role-identities are predicated on recurrent interactions between role partners and provide the self with meaning" (Owens et al. 480). In addition, Erving Goffman described the influence of roles and role-playing on society, depicting them as tools that have a theatrical nature: "Roles may not only be played but also played at, as when children, stage actors, and other kinds of cutups mimic a role for the avowed purpose of make-believe; here, surely, doing is not being" (qtd. in Waskul and Lust 333). Every individual in society assumes roles in order to maintain specific positions of prestige and power, which constitute parts of their identity.

2.1. Role Playing Games

Role-playing video games are deeply rooted in popular and mainstream culture gaining a cult following ever since their appearance in the late twentieth century. As a system of unique and imaginative narratives, role-playing video games provide an opportunity for escapism, a chance to step into unfamiliar worlds and explore the scenarios and various identities and roles that differ from real life: "Role-playing games constitute a unique environment in which fantasy, imagination, and reality intersect and oblige participants to occupy the role of a 'PC,' gaming lingo for 'player-character'-a marginal hyphenated role that is situated in the liminal boundaries of more than one frame of reality" (Waskul and Lust 334).

As an electronic game genre, role-playing video games largely owe their success and popularity to TSR, Inc.'s first publication of the tabletop role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*: "After corresponding with Gygax and additional play-testing, *Dungeons & Dragons*

was first published in 1974 by Gygax's company, TSR Hobbies, Inc." (Waskul and Lust 334). *Dungeons & Dragons*, abbreviated as *D&D*, is a role-playing game for smaller groups of people in which every player assumes a certain role, ranging from the role of healer, or warrior to a wizard, and their variations in later advanced editions of the game. The group of players is supervised by a Game or a Dungeon Master, who serves as the storyteller, referee, and guide to the group in the quest of battling evil. The Game Master creates the game world, sets scenarios, and plays non-player characters in order to interact with the players by providing them with additional side quests on their journey: "Role-playing games require a referee who functions analogously to the author of a fiction, The referee establishes the setting in which the story occurs, populates the setting with humans and other creature, and plays a large role in the creation of the player-characters" (Doty 51).

The game scenario is the most stable part of the entire role-playing experience; it is fixed in nature, with only minor changes allowed when need be: "The unit in role-playing that is most like a finished story is the scenario. A scenario has a beginning, a middle, and end. It gives the players reasons for engaging in various actions" (Doty 51). The game world, scenery, social context, and events that occur are pre-set in order to provide the players with the best possible experience: "The specific events of the game arise from the interaction between the referee's scenario and the player's decision. Scenarios are usually part of a larger campaign, in which the players engage in a series of scenarios. The campaign is set in a game world constructed for a particular gaming system" (Doty 52).

Role-playing games often come with a set of rules and mechanics that govern gameplay and narrative progression. These rules and game mechanics affect the player-character's capabilities and the ability to progress and level up which keeps the player engaged in the game world. Many variations of tabletop role-playing games, such as *Pathfinder*, *Call of Cthulhu,* and *Dungeons & Dragons* have dice-based systems that determine the probability and success

rate of player choices: "Participants use dice to generate random numbers that correspond to the traits and abilities of a fantasy persona. Once created, these fantasy personas are imaginatively role-played" (Waskul and Lust 335). A recent, modern take on the tabletop role-playing experience is Larian Studios' *Baldur's Gate 3* (2023), which is a role-playing video game heavily inspired by the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Quality player experience is a key factor of immersion in fantasy role-playing games; players become progressively more engaged in the fantasy game world if the experience is enjoyable, and enjoyment fosters an emotional connection between the players and their characters. Players become attached to their characters, becoming invested in their character's fate, which provides a meaningful and immersive storytelling experience: "Instead, the goals of the game are survival and character development: participants crate and play fantasy personas that, if kept 'alive,' increase and advance skills and abilities over the course of many often-lengthy gaming sessions" (Waskul and Lust 336). Another reason why fantasy role-playing games are so enticing to players is their non-competitive nature: "Clearly, fantasy role-playing games are leisure activities that involve a unique form of play. 'The game' is not competitive, has no time limits, is not scored, and has no definitions of winning or losing" (Waskul and Lust 336). In addition, the roles of player-characters can coincide with the social status of the participants, which brings familiarity to an unknown world and improves player immersion: "Participants in fantasy role-playing games are not only personas and players; they may also be called students, employees, adolescents, adults, spouses, parent, and a wide variety of other statuses they occupy and roles they play in everyday life" (Waskul and Lust 337).

2.2. Fantasy Characters as Models for Video Games

The topic of the introduction of fantasy characters as models for video games delves into the realm of adaptation, specifically, the adaptation of literary works into visual media. Literary adaptation is described as a process of transforming and translating a written work into

another medium. The process of adaptation involves the conversion and alteration of the original work's narrative, characters, and themes into a format that is suitable for the contemporary medium. The often negative connotations linked with literary adaptations stem from the fear that the adaptations would not pay proper homage to the original work, which leads to the demonization of such works: "Critics were focused mostly on the different angles referring to betrayal, deformation, violation, and vulgarization of the original piece, which would always lead to the discussions about infidelity" (Araujo 223). It is impossible to adapt any literary work without some form of artistic liberty involved:

> Transforming or transposing a piece from a genre to another implies making an adaptation, whose object is a narrative content kept more or less faithful with sometimes considerable differences. The same does not occur when the discursive structure goes through a radical transformation, that is, when the enunciation device is entirely different from the original, for example, transposing a romance to the movies or to a game. (Araujo 224)

The adaptation may lack some elements that existed in the previous work, but it does not consider the revivification of various distinct elements, such as sounds, distinct landscapes, and character appearances in audio-visual media, primarily video games. Hutcheon defends the adaptation process claiming that one of the implications of originality is "the assumption that what the writer put on paper is what we read" (2).

Fantasy literature is a suitable inspiration for many video-games as the genre is known for its intricate worlds, unique characters, and magical elements. Many fantasy novels, including J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* series of novels, feature awe-inspiring settings that are perfect for audio-visual adaptation: "In this visible and sustainable relation between literature and games, it is important to highlight that several consecrated literary works are constantly visited by game producers, even though there

are no explicit references" (Araujo 229). An example of such relation between literature and games are *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* (2014), and *Middle-earth: Shadow of War* (2017), popular fantasy video games based on the narratives by J. R. R. Tolkien. Such fantasy worlds allow the players to embark on epic quests spanning fantastical landscapes in order to uncover hidden secrets and encounter unique creatures. Moreover, video games offer the opportunity for the player to assume the role of a hero and engage in epic quests, battling formidable foes and overcoming great challenges:

> Following this line of thought, literature constitutes an important foundation for this recent phenomenon, generated by virtual games, as it presents the narrative structures for the adaptation process. In a game, the player runs into a similar experience to that of reading a book: navigating through deep narratives by inserting himself/herself in them; being an active participant in the story created (and not just a reader); taking part in the ideologies contained in the game and also being transformed by them; settling great historical events from mankind. (Araujo 230)

Hutcheon claims that another justification in the defence of literary adaptation into visual media lies in the resurrection and reaffirmation of the original work: "What happens to the literary text that is being adapted, often multiple times? Rather than being displaced by the adaptation, it most frequently gets a new life: new editions of the book appear, with stills from the movie adaptation on its cover" (3). Araujo emphasizes the contemporary reader's role in the context of literary adaptation into virtual games: "Virtual games, for example, offer the reader/gamer the possibility to be, at the same time, active and passive in a constant construction, creation and recreation process in which the user is an integrative part of the narrative" (Araujo 231).

3. On Geralt of Rivia: Portrayal and Analysis

Geralt of Rivia is a fictional character and the central protagonist of the Witcher series of novels, and later video game adaptations. Geralt of Rivia's first appearance was in a short story, *Wiedźmin*, written by the Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. The short story was first published in the *Fantastyka* magazine and later re-published in the novel *The Last Wish* (1993). The novel introduces the witcher Geralt and his famous clash with a striga, a rare type of monster in the series. Witchers belong to an order of professional monster hunters and slayers trained in the ways of swordsmanship and alchemy. Witchers are not born, rather, they are made through a process known as the Trial of the Grasses, an abominable process that involves the use of alchemical treatments and magical mutations to grant witchers enhanced physical capabilities, such as accelerated healing, heightened senses, and longer lifespans at the expense of their fertility. Witchers are exclusively male children trained from a very young age; the intention behind creating witchers was to engineer warriors that possessed both the qualities of mages and knights, mage-knights that would hunt and exterminate legendary monsters: "I've heard about witchers – they abduct tiny children whom they feed with magic herbs. The ones who survive become witchers themselves, sorcerers with inhuman powers. They're taught to kill, and all human feelings and reactions are trained out of them. They're turned into monsters in order to kill other monsters" (Sapkowski, *The Last Wish* 50). The only exception to the rule of witchers being exclusively male is Cirilla, Geralt of Rivia's protégé and daughter figure.

Geralt is known by his sobriquet, The White Wolf, due to his distinctive white hair, which is the result of additional experimental mutagens he was subjected to during the Trial of the Grasses. The experimental mutagens granted him considerably greater agility, strength, and stamina as well as complete immunity to diseases and conventional poisons, and an extreme resistance to pain. Geralt was born as the son of the sorceress Visenna and presumably the Nordling warrior, Korin. Due to unknown reasons, Geralt was left at a very young age in witcher

Vesemir's care, who took him as his protégé in the witcher stronghold of Kaer Morhen in the kingdom of Kaedwen. Geralt later rose to prominence as a renowned monster slayer and swordsman, taking on various monster-hunting contracts, being involved in multiple political conflicts, and navigating the social dilemmas of a morally ambiguous world.

3.1. Geralt of Rivia as a Byronic Hero

Geralt of Rivia exhibits several characteristics that draw inspiration from traditional Byronic heroes of the Romantic literary period. The most notable characteristic associated with the Byronic hero is the trait of the outcast: "There is no place for the Witcher. He does not belong to a natural world. He is supernatural and uprooted; a construct, a cultural hybrid composed of various forms and meaning, drawn from Arthurian legends, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Man with No Name, constituting not only a literary, but also a corporeal hybrid" (Matuszek 132). This trait of the outcast is further reinforced in *The Last Wish* (1993), and *Sword of Destiny* (1992); the novels provide a background into Geralt's early life, during which "as a child, he was subjected to mutations, stuffed with hormones, and injected with viruses. To be transformed into an emotionless machine programmed to kill, he had to undergo a series of experiments" (Matuszek 132).

Another inherently Byronic trait that Geralt embodies is the trait of the traveller/wanderer: "He is free and indifferent to political, economic, and social determinants. Based entirely on his own principles, his ways are often incomprehensible to others. He roams freely, showing total disregard for state borders and distances" (Matuszek 133).

A common characteristic of Byronic heroes that Geralt also shares is the cynicism and scepticism observed in darker aspects of society and human nature: "Geralt remains cynical in the face of this deprivation by convincing himself that such an attitude – aloof professionalism, disillusioned with humanity – is a sign of his (imaginary) manhood" (Matuszek 135), and the rejection of traditional and conventional social values and ideals: "He does his job, reaps the

reward (from a king or a pauper, all the same) and carries on with his business, uninvolved with the consequences of his (always superficial) actions" (Matuszek 135). Geralt's disillusionment is further rooted in his reluctance to make a difference in the world; meddling in matters that do not concern him have no interest or importance, which also aligns with a sense of moral ambiguity that most Byronic heroes are challenged by: "'Evil is evil, Stegobor,' said the witcher seriously as he got up. 'Lesser, greater, middling, it's all the same. Proportions 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" (Sapkowski, *The Last Wish* 90-91). Moreover, Matuszek claims that one of the reasons Geralt became so disillusioned with the world is because "Early on, Geralt realizes that this is not a world designed for heroes, nor for knights-errant and protectors of damsels in distress" (137). A sense of alienation and isolation shared by many Byronic heroes also occurs in Geralt: "The Witcher has no family or dwelling. He is never at home and has no room of his own: 'Geralt of Rivia spares no time for being a private person,' remaining exclusively and completely a public individual; however, at the same time, he is entirely alienated" Matuszek 133).

3.2. The Literary Geralt vs. The Video Game Geralt

Whereas Geralt of Rivia in the literary format fully embodies the traditional traits of the Byronic hero archetype, the one in video game adaptations challenges some of them. The atypical take of Geralt as a Byronic hero in the video game *The Witcher* (2007), released by CD Projekt RED, comprises a variety of clashing traits; while Byronic heroes are often characterised by a wide range of intense emotions and inner turmoil, which they often openly express, Geralt shows an emotionally restrained and composed demeanour. This emotional restraint contrasts Geralt's character with passionate, emotionally volatile Byronic heroes. Furthermore, Geralt of Rivia as a video game character possesses a strong moral compass, while living in a morally ambiguous world; he refuses to harm innocent beings, including non-hostile

monsters, aids those in need, and finds himself at the centre of various social and political conflicts, enacting the role of a mediator.

Another characteristic of the video game Geralt that diverges from the traditional Byronic hero archetype is the departure from the self-destructive tendencies of Byronic heroes:

> The Witcher unconsciously desires to be castrated, because what he really wants is to live a normal life as a normal man (and there is no 'normal life' and/or 'normal man' without symbolic castration. He wants to stop being a nomadic machine whose default mode is acting blindly. He wants to be charged with a symbolic mission: that of protector, guardian, husband, and father. (Matuszek 140)

Geralt's relationships, particularly with characters like Yennefer of Vengerberg and Ciri, are marked with stability, loyalty, and a sense of family, which deviate from the passionate and tumultuous romances of Byronic heroes. Geralt's role as a fatherly figure to his protégé and step-daughter Ciri displays qualities of a guardian and protector, which go beyond the typical view of Byronic heroes. Moreover, Geralt often adapts to puzzling social and political circumstances, displaying pragmatic and intuitive qualities, which is a departure from the unconventional and uncompromising nature of Byronic heroes: "At times he may seem cynical, at others surprisingly principled and conscientious, but only within the strict limits of institutionalized knowledge about the franchise, and with clearly defined reference to the complete cultural baggage that *The Witcher* alludes to" (Matuszek 130).

The differences between the literary version of Geralt, and the video game Geralt lie in the creative liberties taken by CD Projekt RED in the release of the first video game adaptation, *The Witcher* (2007). The video game represents a creative interpretation of the source material, most notably the novels *The Last Wish* (1993), and *The Sword of Destiny* (1992), taking certain artistic liberties, providing Geralt with a voice, offering players agency over Geralt's choices

and actions, and presenting Geralt's combat abilities, such as the use of Witcher signs and dynamic visual swordsmanship. The video game Geralt also enjoys the freedom of exploration, taking on contracts and side quests as desired, while the literary Geralt follows a more fixed and linear narrative structure.

Conclusion

Byronic heroes are by-products of the literary and cultural developments of the late eighteenth, and early nineteenth century. They are variants of the Romantic hero archetype associated with the English Romantic poet Lord Byron, whose erratic and unconventional lifestyle deeply influenced the rebellious, alienated, brooding, and introspective nature of his characters. This variant of the Romantic hero can be traced in subsequent literary periods and genres, such as various works of fantasy fiction literature. The genre of fantasy fiction is enchanting due to its mysterious, otherworldly settings, magical phenomena and creatures.

Dark fantasy fiction protagonists are similar to Byronic heroes in the sense that they challenge the traditional, conventional social values and norms of alternate worlds, which leaves them alienated and rejected by that society. Due to their imperfect and fallible nature, which offers a sense of familiarity, Byronic heroes that appear in fantasy fiction are suitable candidates for visual media adaptations as they offer a sense of estrangement and escapism that readers can identify with as well as immerse themselves in. In addition, fantasy fiction literature is an excellent template in the construction of video games as fantasy role-playing games offer an environment in which reality, imagination and fantasy combine in order to create an enjoyable, immersive experience in the exploration the vast unknown. Players assume the roles of player-characters, which raises the player's interest in the game's setting, and bonds them with the character. The character of Geralt of Rivia is reminiscent of the traditional elements of

Romantic and Byronic heroes, such as the traits of the outcast and wanderer, as well as the cynicism, escapism, indifference and disillusionment, as well as alienation.

However, the video game version of Geralt shows a distinct array of traits that clash with Romantic and Byronic archetypal notions: he shows an emotionally restrained and composed demeanour, possesses a strong moral and ethical compass, enacts the role of a mediator in various social and political conflicts in *The Witcher* (2007), and lacks the self-destructive tendencies of Byronic heroes. In addition, Geralt is pragmatic and fosters an intuitive approach to various circumstances, which is a divergence from the uncompromising and unconventional nature of the Byronic hero archetype.

To conclude, by analysing Romantic and other literary elements that influenced the creation of the Byronic hero archetype, this paper shows that the video game character of Geralt of Rivia is an atypical embodiment of a Byronic hero, presenting the distinctions between the original, literary form of the character from the novels *The Last Wish* (1993) and *Sword of Destiny* (1992) written by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski, which matches the Byronic hero archetype, as opposed to his visual adaptation and representation by the Polish video game studio CD Projekt RED in the first video game adaptation of *The Witcher* (2007).

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