Bakalářská práce

Analyzing and comparing Multiculturalism via Interracial Romantic Relationships in Andrzej Sapkowski's The Witcher Series and the TV Neflix series

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Zásady pro vypracování:

Cílem práce je výzkum, analýza a porovnání rasové diverzity, zejména rasových vztahů v sérii Zaklínač od Andrzeje Sapkowského a jejího televizního zpracování. V teoretické části analyzuji tuto problematiku a její výskyt v odborné literatuře a kritikách fantasy literatury. Praktická část práce se bude zabývat touto problematikou v knižní sérii Zaklínač a následným porovnáním s televizním zpracováním série a vše analyzovat zejména z pohledu rasovosti.

Metody:

1. Studium odborné literatury
2. Sběr a analýza dat
3. Analýza informací získaných z knižní série Zaklínač
4. Analýza informací z televizní série Zaklínač
5. Komparace obou zpracování

Rozsah grafických prací:
Rozsah pracovní zprávy:
Forma zpracování práce: tištěná/elektronická
Jazyk práce: angličtina

Seznam odborné literatury:

Dzięcioł-Pędich, Agnieszka and Marcin Pędich. 2017. "Constructions of the Other in Polish Fantasy Literature". *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies*, č. 18(3): 48–60. https://doi.org/10.15290/cr.2017.18.3.04.
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L.S.

prof. RNDr. Jan Picek, CSc.   Mgr. Zénó Vernyik, Ph.D.
děkan   garant studijního programu

V Liberci dne 9. června 2022

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8. července 2024   Anežka Koucká

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ANOTACE

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat prvky multikulturalismu v knižní i televizní sérii *Zaklínač*, zejména pomocí mezirasových romantických vztahů postav. Tyto vztahy jsou silně ovlivněny rasovými a kulturními rozdíly mezi partnery a úkolem této práce je najít a analyzovat problémy, kterým mezirazové páry čelí, jak tyto problémy ovlivňují jejich vztahy a děj příběhu a jaké podobnosti lze nají u mezirasových vztahů v reálném světě.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Zaklínač, multikulturalismus, mezirasové vztahy, rasismus, kultura, předsudek

ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis focuses on the analysis of multiculturalism via racial and interracial relationships in the series *The Witcher* by Andrzej Sapkowski. This includes both romantic and political relationships, and their function in the book and the TV series by Netflix. The focus is on how interracial relationships work in the story and what issues the couples face due to their racial backgrounds. The main point of the analysis is to analyse and discover several types of issues that occur in the multiracial world of The Witcher and what similarities are there with real-world interracial relationships.

KEY WORDS

The Witcher, multiculturalism, interracial relationships, rasism, culture, prejudice

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1. Introduction

Multiculturalism and multiracial families are a prevailing phenomenon in modern society (Atkin and Yoo 2019). This appears not only in high culture but also in contemporary popular culture, Oscar-winning films and Hollywood blockbusters, as well as literary bestsellers. The fantasy and science fiction genres are no exceptions; enough to mention here the young adult books of Rick Riordan or the "Afrofuturism" of Octavia E. Butler (Riordan 2010-2012; Rothberg 2021).

The Witcher series by Andrzej Sapkowski became a huge success in Poland and thanks to the video game adaptations by CD PROJECT, the franchise's popularity grew even more and sparked a global phenomenon. Recently, in 2019, a Netflix TV series was released and the main protagonists, Geralt of Rivia and Yennefer of Vengeberg, became favourites of many fans around the world, mainly because of the actors Henry Cavill and Anya Chalotra. The blend of Slavic traditions and myths with a unique fantasy story containing "distinctive but not caricatured protagonists" and "a complex, multi-stranded narrative" contributes to its widespread appeal (Majkowski 2021).

The first short story written by Andrzej Sapkowski, named *Wiedźmin*, first appeared in a Polish magazine *Fantastyka* in 1986 for a writing competition and claimed third place. Later, *The Witcher* book series, published in the years between 1992 to 1996, became a blockbuster in Polish fantasy literature. The series comprises *Sword of Destiny* (1992), *The Last Wish* (1993), *Blood of Elves* (1994), *Time of Contempt* (1995), *Baptism of Fire* (1996).

Books that follow the original series are *The Tower of the Swallow* (1997) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1999).

The saga's popularity grew even more as it was translated into more languages, especially English. Additionally, the CD PROJECT RED released a computer game adaptation series in 2007, and these adaptations became successful among many players according to Steam statistics (Steam 2024). Currently, one of the most popular versions is the Netflix series (2019 –), which portrays a mediaeval fantasy drama filled with magic, well-made costumes, performances, and sword fights. Nevertheless, according to the critical consensus, the show is simple and bland, especially in comparison to the original series (Gawroński and Bajorek 2020, 6).

Despite the immense popularity of *The Witcher* series in computer games and its overall success, there is a scarcity of secondary literature on the franchise. Existing studies that explore racial or ethnic issues mostly focus on the games and TV series, analysing "the dissonance between the Slavic and universal dimensions" of *The Witcher* (Gawroński and Bajorek 2020, 1). They draw parallels to traditionally romanticised portrayals of indigenous ethnic minorities, suggesting that the franchise remains within Orientalist approaches when portraying Eastern-European or non-white characters (Imre 2023, 1581) and "perpetuate[s] the enduring fantasy of white innocence" (Imre 2023, 1572). Some scholars even identify "conservative attachment to aesthetics engendered by 19th-century European colonial empires" in the racial representation of the saga (Majkowski 2021). In the games, according to Feller, *The Witcher* "contains the player experience within the bounds of the straight, white, cisgender, male body – albeit labelled Other within the narrative" (2023, 170).

Grigoli argues that "'neomedieval' works of contemporary fiction, from *Game of Thrones* to *The Witcher*, have continued to insist on White racial homogeneity in the worlds they construct rooted in the imagined White racial homogeneity of the Middle Ages" (2023, 352). Majkowski also says that "the central character [Geralt] is provided with a dangerous combination of the colonial idea of neutral knowledge and an ability to distinguish human from non-human" (2018, 26). Imre detects white Eastern-European "populist-nationalist" fantasies in the story's descriptions of races (2023, 1570-1571). This is strengthened by the behaviour of certain Polish fans who criticise the intrusion of people of colour in the Netflix adaptation, claiming that the saga "should be depicted in the right – i.e. white – way" (Majkowski 2021).

This thesis argues against this type of critical and fan reception, asserting that the impact of interracial couples not only drives the narrative but also serves as a challenge and critique of discriminatory attitudes prevalent in their world. The relationships, shaped by diverse backgrounds and societal prejudices, draw parallels to existing interracial relationships and other racial family issues as described in historical and sociological research.

As Majkowski (2021) observes, Sapkowski incorporates themes mirroring actual societal issues, like abortion, environmental protection, and religion, influenced by feedback from his readership. *The Witcher* explores complex themes such as race, power, and coexistence through interracial relationships. This thesis focuses on the problems of interracial relationships in the series, analysing what challenges the couples face and how these problems are addressed in the series. Parallels are drawn between the races in the series

and historical colonial encounters, reflecting societal prejudices and racial marginalisation.

First, I analyse the problematics of interraciality and multiculturalism in the fantasy genre, mostly drawing on Helen Young's *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness*. In the next chapter, I present various issues concerning multiculturalism in *The Witcher* book and TV series, beginning with the discrimination towards non-human races combined with a complicated political situation of the fictional world named Continent. This problem mainly involves the Elves and Humans, who fight each other for centuries. Following Michalska, I interpret the main character Geralt as an exiled outsider who is "unable to find his place in a society" (2020, 9). The most important aspect which I analyse is interracial relationships, namely, the one between Lara Dorren and Cregennan of Lod, as well as between Geralt of Rivia and Yennefer of Vengeberg. Finally, I describe the significance of interracial adoption in the family of Geralt, Yennefer and their adopted daughter Ciri. I focus on how these family bonds affect the partners' behaviour and psychological well-being throughout the story, using a historical approach and socio-psychological studies on interracial relationships.

For language enhancement purposes only, I used Artificial Intelligence Microsoft Copilot (2023) throughout the thesis (without translations) to paraphrase the English language draft version of my argumentation. All ideas in this thesis derive from my own research.

2. Race and hybridity in fantasy literature

The popular genre of fantasy has been impactful for centuries, and it has gone through various changes. Traditionally, the genre is influenced by neomedievalism and racism (Alvestad 2023, 8-9; Grigoli 2023, 348-350) and has a label of being Eurocentric, which means it is by, for and about white people. As Helen Young states, "whiteness as a default setting is as much a feature of the Fantasy genre as it is of Western culture and society" (Young 2016, 1). Imre confirms that the narrative of colonialism and "white innocence" often "favours particular genres, most notably high fantasy" (2023, 1571). Thus, in the 20th and 21st centuries, literary critics, social movements, and individuals have increasingly demanded racial equality in fantasy literature.

White superiority in fantasy literature roots from the colonial era, when Western Europe, mainly Great Britain, colonised vast sections of the world, both politically and culturally. The white man and Anglo-Saxon culture were considered superior at that time, which becomes palpable in numerous works from that era, including fantasy. The great classics of the genre, for example, works by J. R. R. Tolkien or C. S. Lewis, are based on European myths, culture, history, and literature. For example, the world of *The Hobbit*, according to Young, resembles nineteenth-century England and Anglo-Saxons, while Gondorrians possess some Germanic values (2016, 22). Tolkien's personal experiences heavily influenced the representation of race in his works (Young 2016, 16). There is also an obvious distinction between Good and Evil, which is depicted by Sauron's army. The characters are mostly orcs or other creatures,

collected under one category of Otherness, which is non-European or non-White (Straubhaar 2004,101–116).

Similarly, Robert E. Howard's *The Complete Chronicles of Conan* (1932) revolves around a white Anglo-Saxon hero, but also a savage, who has brown, suntanned skin, and broad shoulders, which makes him suitable for ruling over Southern, hence supposedly more primitive, lands. In the books, there is a topic of slavery, which is described as "a classic American model" (Young 2016, 26), so slaves are racially in the lower ranks than their masters, indicating that Whites are always leaders.

Samuel R. Delany, in his *Return to Nevèrÿon* (1987), explores the topic of race differently. In the stories, people of colour stand in the centre, they rule the land, whereas the white characters live at the edge of the society, as outcasts or even slaves. On the other hand, the fantasy world of this series is based on Mediterranean and African cultures, and so he created a fantasy where the stereotypical habits of Whiteness are more ambiguous. His exploration of race goes even further in the aspects of diversity between people. Delany does not use the racial markers we know from, for example, Tolkien, such as physical appearance. What he did was create "white" people with many characteristics and appearances, who are not based on any known culture or race. The main aspect he focuses on, in his novels, is culture and individual tendency, rather than racial descent (Young 2016, 46 – 47).

Races in fantasy usually differ physically from humans and may use their own language. The original fantasy races are Elves, Dwarfs, Orcs. Later, more races like Vampires, Gnomes, Werewolves, Pixies, or Demons were introduced through colonisation (Young 2016, 89). In various works, these races do not

live in peace with humans. Typically, only Elves or Dwarfs are on the human side, in the stories, for example, of *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien or *The Inheritance Cycle Series* (2003-2011) by Christopher Paolini.

Aside from such questionable racial representations, the fantasy genre has enormous potential, which is still somewhat underutilised, to construct and create worlds where ideologies or conceptions, such as race, can be re-contextualised. In general, this means that authors can create worlds with different rules, different understandings of races, and reformed politics. As Young (2016, 4) argues, when discussing races, ethnicity, or otherness, fantasy fiction is a great source for this for its imaginative base. Authors have a place to safely explore and introduce topics of social and cultural issues, for which they can also make solutions. This has become even more approachable for the audience with fantasy adaptations in feature films, television, online fan fiction, and video games.

What is crucial in the fantasy genre is the way its world is constructed and how it depicts the Other. Usually, this description of the other is based on broad Fantasy archetypes, which are named by Stepan (1991, 89) as "internalisation". In this context, "internalisation" means "the very profound psychological and social introjection of negative images and meanings contained in the stereotypes, in the contraction and understanding of one's self-identity as a racialized other" (Stepan 1991, 89). The Fantasy "species" or "races" created this way are often stereotypes of ethnic or religious groups and may lead to the conclusion that the way they behave in the story is the same as in the real world (Rumsby 2018, 22).

Fantasy deals with the themes of interraciality and inbreeding as well. In the sixteenth century, in colonial America, a few interracial unions occurred but were banned later in the seventeenth century, so whites could stay "pure" (Reynolds 2009, 14). After Darwin's *Origin of the Species* was published in 1859, scientists started studying racial differences, leading to the development of eugenics and other ideologies of "scientific racism." According to such theories, racial mixing or impurity leads to the corruption and loss of good qualities of both races. This became known as miscegenation in the mid-nineteenth century (Young 2016, 24). Such views rely on the idea of "higher" and "more intelligent" human races being superior to those "savage" or "lower" (Sanchez-Taylor 2014, 6). Politics changed in America only in the second half of the twentieth century, when minorities started to be engaged in their civil rights movements. Currently, ideas of miscegenation and eugenics are being disproved by technological growth in science, leading to conclusions that there is no connection between race and human qualities (Sanchez-Taylor 2014, 6).

In fantasy and Young Adult literature, mixed heritage topics have grown in popularity in the 21st century. Many teenage readers have yet to discover who they are and what kind of identity they have, and reading fantasy can provide help with this (Reynolds 2009, 16). Thus, there is a growing number of contemporary authors who include mixed-race characters in their stories, for example, Rick Riordan in his *The Kane Chronicles* series (2010-2012), in which the mixed-race appearance of both main protagonists is important for searching for their identity. Rick Riordan also uses mixed-heritage concepts in his series *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005–2009), but more

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metaphorically. In the story, the characters are *demigods* or *half-bloods,* which means they share human and Greek-god blood. Thus, the characters juggle being regular teenagers and world-saving heroes.

Another "sub-genre" where we can find interracial relationships or hybridity is superhero comics and stories. Superheroes in these stories are usually mutants or hybrids and are considered different by society. Some of them are black or mixed-raced, which adds to the "otherness" of those characters. In the beginning of superhero comics, the main characters were usually white. This started to change in the late 20th and 21st centuries, urged by celebrities such as W. Kamau Bell and his commentary about racial representation in superhero comics and inspired by political figures like Barack Obama. Writers, such as Will Harris and Grant Morrison, saw an opportunity and used his image as an inspiration in their stories (Dagbovie-Mullins 2021, 2). As minority recognition grew, many superhero movies were released, casting mixed-race actors, for instance, *Blade* (1998) by Stephen Norrington or *Sleight* (2016) by J.D. Dillard (2016; Dagbovie-Mullins and Berlatsky 2021, 2).

3. Multiculturalism in *The Witcher*

3.1. Elves and Humans as a Metaphor of Colonial Encounters in North America

Elves as a race, as well as their relationships with humans, are displayed in various ways in fantasy literature. In traditional Tolkienian fantasy, elves are usually displayed as a noble, wise, and beautiful race and other races consider them as something divine, and this may be the most common image that

fantasy readers usually expect. Other authors, such as Terry Pratchett, modified the positive image of elves and turned it into a dark theme, showing elves as ruthless, cruel and rather primitive races. J. K. Rowling used elves as creatures who submit and serve to one or more people (Simpson 2011, 76–77). While in *The Witcher* saga the elven characteristics are similar to Tolkien's version, the relationship between humans and elves is rather unique. The struggle between these two races extends far beyond a mere fictional conflict – it is a reflection of our own world's historical and current racial issues.

In *The Witcher* saga, the elves are descendants of the Elder Blood race, and are, as other non-humans, persecuted by the Nordlings, humans who live in the northern part of the Continent. This oppression, called "The First Landing," began with the arrival of humans to the Continent, whose fast colonisation made the elves run to the East (Sapkowski 2008, 22). This is similar to actual historical events, especially the arrival of European colonists in America and their initiation of ethnic extermination or subjugation of the Native American population. As Uniłowski observes, just as the dwarves in Sapkowski's series were endowed with features evoking the cultural stereotype of Jews (experience of ghettos and pogroms, domination of the banking market, preference for valuables)[1], so the fate of the elves has a lot in common with the history of the indigenous people of America (2017, 526).

There is a certain organisation which fights the oppression from humans in *The Witcher* series – the Scoia'tael group. The portrayal of the Scoia'tael group in *The Witcher* series, both in the original books and the Netflix

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[1] In *Time of Contempt*, the usage of the word pogrom specifically may reflect on the persecution of Jews. (Sapkowski 2013, 110)

adaptation, serves as a complex metaphor for the ongoing struggle between elves and humans, highlighting the themes of discrimination, resistance, and the quest for equality.[2]

The Scoia'tael is firstly introduced in *Blood of Elves* and is described as groups of bandits who fight human oppression. They become a central element in the books as their actions begin to affect socio-politics more. This quickly becomes an issue when the Scoia'tael forms an alliance with Nilfgaard, who offer them a refuge and home. This event has a significant impact on the Continent's political powers, as some humans begin to accuse the royalty of the existence of these "terrorist" groups. Some people even suggest that all the non-humans should be captured and kept in one place:

> "Then we have to seize them all!" "Ah." The merchant smiled. "I understand. I've heard that somewhere before. Take everyone by the scruff of their neck and throw them down the mines, into enclosed camps, into quarries.[3] Everyone. The innocent, too. Women and children. Is that right?" (Sapkowski 2008, 101)

This excerpt shows once again similarity to the European colonisation of the US, whereby the elves and Scoia'tael may resemble an image of the Native Americans during the 16th and 17th centuries. The indigenous people also first welcomed the colonisers, yet later as they were more and more oppressed, they

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[2] The elven-human wars resulted in significant reduction in elven numbers, and they were forced to flee, hide themselves and leave their advanced technology and towns to fall. In the present times, in the saga, elves hide from others, forming groups, as they try to survive.

[3] The phrasing, which clearly evokes the initiation of internment camps, is almost the same in Polish. The Polish original says: "…Do kopalni, do ogrodzonych obozów, do kamieniołomów," which translates to "…To the mines, fenced camps, to quarries." (Sapkowski 1994, 86)

tried to fight back. Those who had to give up their land to the colonists were then forced to emigrate through the acts of the "Indian removal". The most famous of such historical events is known as the "Trail of Tears". Those who stayed and stood up against their oppressors were put into slavery or massacred by the US. government (Pauls 2024). In *The Witcher*, this happened to the elves during "The First Landing".

Another historical event reflected in the books is the Second Seminole War (1835 – 1842). This conflict between the Seminole tribe and the U.S. government began after the Indian Removal Act as the indigenous people led a resistance movement against the colonists (Bauer 2023). Their tactics of guerrilla warfare may be an inspiration for the Scoia'tael group, as they form these guerrillas, known as commandos, as well.

Another example of the subtle and metaphoric illustration of racial division is that some races, despite the discrimination, choose to live among humans, yet their assimilation attempts lead to tensions, as there are hints of hatred and prejudices on both sides. The targets of these accusations are mainly those with elven lineage. Even though there is no explicit mention of these matters in the books, there is evidence suggesting the presence of racism. For example, in the *Blood of Elves,* there is a quotation that states: "A good elf is a dead elf"[4] (Sapkowski 2008, 94), which is the same as the words commonly attributed to Philip Sheridan: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" (Mieder 1993, 38). This also stems from the existence of Scoia'tael and their alliance with Nilfgaard. This decision further intensifies the animosity towards the elves. In *Sword of Destiny,* there is an example of human's view on elven ancestry:

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[4] "Dobry elf, to martwy elf" in Polish (Sapkowski 1994, 82)

No one knows why they keep changing because anyway, every second one is a half-elf or quarter-elf; accursed blood and race. Everything bad is the fault of the elves (Sapkowski 2015, 90).

Another illustration of this hatred towards elves for their blood descendants and their actions in Nilfgaard is in *Blood of Elves*:

"That's where it stings," laughed Vilibert. "You're blowing the same horn as Nilfgaard because Nilfgaard is also shouting about equality, promising you a return to the old order as soon as we've been conquered and they've scythed us off these lands. That's the sort of unity, the sort of equality you're dreaming of, the sort you're talking about and trumpeting! Nilfgaard pays you gold to do it! And it's hardly surprising you love each other so much, the Nilfgaardians being an elven race—"

"Nonsense," the elf said coldly. "You talk rubbish, sir knight. You're clearly blinded by racism. The Nilfgaardians are human, just like you."

"That's an outright lie! They're descended from the Black Seidhe and everyone knows it! Elven blood flows through their veins! The blood of elves!" (Sapkowski 2008, 23)

The prominence of elven-human relationships is emphasised in the Netflix series; however, the focus primarily lies on the plight of the Scoia'tael

and the surviving elves. The viewers are presented with more dynamic actions in the present time and with the political sphere being more present. Thus, while the books delve more into historical context at a much slower pace, the series presents action and dynamics. [5]

The rationale behind this phenomenon may be attributed to the filmmakers' deliberate intention to enhance the visual spectacle for their audience. Additionally, the inclusion of a discernible contextual backdrop provides viewers with explicit motifs underlying the actions of the Scoia'tael. Furthermore, the dynamic pacing of the Scoia'tael's movement may be inherently influenced by the television series format itself, which prioritises essential elements of the Scoia'tael storyline, infusing it with action, while the original books offer readers a more intricate exploration replete with mystery and detail (see Hutchison 2012, 6).

The Scoia'tael's role is the most prominent in Season Three of the series. The centre of the story revolves around Francesca Findabair, an elven leader, and her pregnancy, which means hope for rebirth of a "pure" elven society. Another storyline shows how Scoia'tael affected the political structure when they form an alliance with Vilgefortz, the leader of the Brotherhood of Sorcerers. He offers the elves that they could slaughter the political leaders and all the mages in Aretuza, who stand between royalty and Scoia'tael (Delicana 2023), which set an instant imbalance between political powers in the whole Continent. However, the results of this are still unknown, as the fourth season has not been released yet.

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[5] The viewers of the television series can see the mistreatment of elves who are held captives as well as the true nature of their struggles. The soldiers view them with disdain, subjecting the elves to both verbal and physical abuse. Moreover, the soldiers frequently employ racist epithets, such as "You elven pig!" or "You elf scum" (Hissrich 2021, S02:E04, 4:24–5:25).

Another recognizable theme in *The Witcher* is the eco-critical tendency, which raises thought-provoking questions and intricately contributes to the complexities of the elven-human relationship. As mentioned before, elves were forced to leave all their possessions behind, which causes them to steal food and try to save as much of healthy nature as possible. The first mention of this issue is in *The Last Wish* when Geralt is captured by such a group of elves:

"Our sylvan friend is on a special mission in the Valley of Flowers. Am I right, Torque? At the elves' request, he's stealing seeds, seedlings, knowledge about farming…" "What else, devil?" "Whatever I can," bleated Torque. "Everything they need. And show me something they don't need. They're starving in the mountains, especially in winter. And they know nothing about farming. And before they've learned to domesticate game or poultry, and to cultivate what they can in their plots of land . . . They haven't got the time, human."

"I don't care a shit about their time. What have I done to them?" groaned Dandelion. 'What wrong have I done them?" (Sapkowski 2008, 105)

This conversation leads to questions about deforestation and materialism:

"The world is huge," repeated the elf. "That's true, human. But you have changed this world. At first, you used force to change it. You treated it as you treat anything that falls into your hands. Now it looks as if the world has started to fit in with you. It's given way to you. It's given in." (Sapkowski 2008, 106)

Another similar example can be seen in *Blood of Elves* (2008):

> We allowed our world, like the pond, to become slimy, boggy and
> sluggish. Look around you there is crime and sin everywhere, greed, the
> pursuit of profit, quarrels and disagreements are rife. Our traditions are
> disappearing, respect for our values is fading. Instead of living according
> to Nature, we have begun to destroy it. And what have we got for it? The
> air is poisoned by the stink of smelting furnaces, the rivers and brooks are
> tainted by slaughter houses and tanneries, forests are being cut down
> without a thought… (21)

Another important aspect of the complex relationship between elves and
humans is the different perspectives and views on each other, which stem from
their cultural backgrounds and many preceding conflicts. The discrimination of,
and contempt for, elves is shown, for example, in the *Sword of Destiny*:

> "Be quiet! I gave you more than I've ever given any other man, you
> scoundrel. I don't know, myself, why I gave it to you. And you... Oh, no,
> my dear. I'm not a slut or an elf-woman met by chance in the forest, who
> can be discarded in the morning, walked out on without being woken,
> with a posy of violets left on the table. Who can be made a mockery of."
> (Sapkowski 2015, 37)

Nevertheless, the discrimination between humans and elves is reciprocal.
In the world of *The Witcher*, elves perceive humans as "hairless apes" or as

beings of lesser status. Elves believe that they were created to be clean and perfect, while humans evolved from apes:

> "Did you hear?" The elf turned to her companion, the tall Seidhe who, not bothering to check Geralt's knots, was strumming away at Dandelion's lute with an expression of indifference on his long face. "Did you hear, Vanadain? The ape-man can talk! He can even be impertinent!" Seidhe shrugged, making the feathers decorating his jacket rustle. […]
>
> "What are you staring at?" hissed the elf, leaning over. "Filthy ape-man! Do you want me to gouge out those insect eyes of yours?" (Sapkowski 2008, 103, 104)

The last aspect which makes the situation complex is the capability of the elves to interbreed with humans. Many pureblood elves believe that half-breeds or quarter-breeds are not worthy to call themselves elves because they have mated with another race. They usually look down on the half-elves and see quarter-elves as humans. This racism accelerates with an ongoing war between the Northern Kingdoms and Nilfgaard, as many people believe that Nilfgaardians are descendants of elves. In general, elven ancestry is an important theme of the story, as people with elven blood have the potential to become immensely powerful and dangerous to the rulers of the Continent. The most important interracial couple who have such a child are the elf Lara Dorren and the human Cregennan of Lod.

3.2. Interracial Couples: Lara Dorren and Cregennan of Lod

Despite their limited mention in the books, Lara Dorren and Cregennan of Lod significantly influence the storyline, mainly via their blood relatives.

As explained in the Introduction, the fictional world of *The Witcher* saga shows similarities to historical events in the Americas, especially colonial encounters between Western powers and the native tribes. In the colonial era of America, the unions between indigenous women and European traders exerted significant influence, altering both trading dynamics and intertribal relations vis-à-vis the colonists. Such marriages were quite common in, for example, Upper Missouri, where native women got an opportunity to explore a different culture and learn from white traders. Their new findings were then introduced to the tribal communities, which helped them to grow, mainly in economy and trade fields (Lansing 2000, 414).

The most well-known Native American women who were married to white men are La Malinche, Pocahontas and Sacagawea. La Malinche was the lover and interpreter of Hernán Cortés, who later married the Spanish captain, Juan Jaramillo. She aided the Spaniard's conquest of the Aztec Empire and gave birth to Cortés's son, Martin, considered by some historians as the first mestizo. The interracial relationship between Lara and Cregennan is, in the fantasy world, the first of this kind, which is similar to La Malinche's story.

Pocahontas married John Rolfe, a tobacco trader, in the beginning of the 17th century and became one of the most known relationships of this kind (Shoemaker 1995). Similarly, Sacagawea was one of the wives of Toussaint Charbonneau, who joined the Lewis and Clark expedition in the West. She was

an important figure who acted as a translator for the expedition, and the Native tribes saw an opportunity for peace due to her actions (Kidwell 1992, 102).

All these women played a significant role in tribal politics with European traders. I am going to focus primarily on the demythologized Pocahontas story, as this shows the greatest similarity to the adventures of Lara and Cregennan.

According to Paul, the romanticized versions of Pocahontas's life omit the narrative of rape or cultural destruction (2014, 90). After the Pocahontas story became popular in America, her image was romanticised by various artists, to fit the standards and role models of Indian women. Pocahontas became the archetypical "noble savage" and "exotic Other," which made her desirable to White men. Such discourses encouraged White men to capture indigenous women, in addition to their lands (Wood 2016, 77). In a similar fashion, in *The Witcher*, the humans took the elven women by force, as well as their lands.

In the fantasy saga, Lara Dorren aep Shiadhal came from a very prestigious family, while Pocahontas was the daughter of the tribal chief Powhatan. Although the books do not offer much information about Lara Dorren, it is known that, according to tradition, she was to marry an elf in order to continue the "pure" and "powerful" bloodline, as she was a carrier of the Elder Blood. [6] Similarly, it is possible that Pocahontas was initially married to a Powhatan man named Kocoum (Paul 2014, 100).

One of the reasons for this tradition is that even though elven lives are long, only young elves are fertile and able to procreate. This is very

[6] In the first video game of *The Witcher*, it is said that the Elder Blood is an elven invention in order to save the elven race from extinction and only few people carried it. Originally, elves with this gene could only mate with their own kind, but Lara broke this law, and thus ruined all plans regarding her offspring (CD PROJECT RED, 2008).

problematic for the elven race, as many elves inbreed with humans, leading to miscegenation and discontinuation of "pure" elven bloodline. This happens to Lara Dorren as well, when she falls in love with the powerful human mage Cregennan of Lod.

According to the series lore, Cregennan is a very powerful and famous mage, who, after completing his studies, advocates the fusion of elven and human teachings of magic. After he meets Lara, he becomes a great believer in the idea of peaceful proximity between different races (Sapkowski 2016, 214), in which, according to some sources, John Rolfe believed as well (Kidwell 1992, 101).

Both races, humans, and elves, interpret this human-elf relationship differently, which results in their hatred for each other. *Baptism of Fire* shows both versions. In the elven version, Lara is depicted as a loving mother, who, even though her child named Riannon has mixed blood, she saves her, sacrificing her own life (Sapkowski 2014, 182). In the views of humans, Lara Dorren is an evil elven witch who betrays Cregennan (Sapkowski 2014, 182).

Interestingly, according to the story lore, this relationship infuriates humans more, because the elves liked Cregennan and his beliefs. Cregennan is betrayed by his own race, and eventually, he and Lara both get killed. The horrible events and racial hatred following the mixed marriage form another similarity with the story of Pocahontas. When she died, John Rolfe and other colonists used the tribe's land to grow tobacco. When tribe members began to revolt as the colony expanded, according to some sources, John Rolfe died in these conflicts (Paul 2014, 97).

Apart from the connections with colonial history, we can also find similarities to the actual hardships of contemporary interracial relationships as they are presented in sociological studies. Such common problems are the public stigma, disapproval from close or distant relatives and relational marginalisation (Brummett and Afifi 2019).

Kurzban and Leary (2001) describe the public stigma as a process which "revolves around exclusion of particular individuals [or groups of people] from certain types of social interactions" (2001, 201). There are various markers of stigmata, but the most common is the skin colour and body features. When a member of a minority group is visible, the observer may ignore the individual personal traits and focuses more on the visible features, such as skin colour or hair texture. This creates the cycle of archetypical assumptions about the whole minority group (Loury 2005, 2).

Disapproval from close or distant relatives is another common issue when it comes to interracial couples. According to Brummett and Afifi's study, which focuses on interracial couples' support expectations from family and how this shapes the support and resilience of the relationship over time, those couples who have supportive families are dealing with the various negative stressors better than those who do not have access to this (2019, 194). They provide social support, help alleviate uncertainty within the relationship and validate the choices made by partners, especially when societal norms discourage racial dissimilarity. Approval from network members, including family, is thought to strengthen commitment in the relationship and enhance skills for managing and overcoming challenges (Brummett and Afifi 2019, 194).

The marginalisation of intercultural couples conveys a powerful message to partners: that they do not truly belong together. It implies that their couple identity (such as 'lover,' 'partner,' or 'spouse') and their cultural identity cannot be harmonised or integrated. This fragmented experience of identity may significantly impact the quality of their romantic relationship (Yampolsky et al. 2021). As some family members or close friends may disapprove of the interracial relationship, they are prone to marginalise the partners, as well (Yampolsky et al. 2021, 2).

The partners of these relationships have to work harder on the maintenance. As they may be a target of marginalisation or discrimination, the members may find it hard to add value to the relationship. For this reason, there are various support methods available, such as specialised psychologists or social network workers who can help with the harder maintenance (Dansby Olufowote et al, 2022). Lara and Cregennan also keep their relationship a secret in the beginning to avoid any stressful situations from both sides. The supportive family members in Lara's and Cregennan relationship come only from Lara's family, as humans do not approve this at all.

Another problem of interracial couples, or even groups, is acculturation. This is a process of migrants adapting to a new culture and society, as well as a society's adaptation to the impacts of immigrants, which is usually very difficult. The research of acculturation focuses most on results on the cultural and psychological levels. The cultural part follows how the minority groups participate in collective activities, whereas the psychological one searches for the changes in the behaviour of individuals towards others in their group as well as the outer groups (Sam and Berry 2010). In the relationship between

Lara and Cregennan, it was Cregennan who had to acculturate, and, in his case, he was accepted by the elves, thanks to his knowledge and passion for elven-human coexistence. Furthermore, he already knew the elven customs and their ways of life from his studies, which made his assimilation and acculturation easier than it would have been for any other person.

In the Netflix series, the relationship between Lara and Cregennan is only mentioned in the first episode of the second season. There, Geralt and Ciri visit the witcher's friend Nivellen, who shows Ciri the story "The Fall of the Elders" about an elf mage who falls in love with a human and whose relationship is therefore doomed (Hissrich, 2021, S02: E01, 29:55).

The important aspect of this is the descendants of this relationship. As stated in the human version of the story, Lara's curse should continue for ten generations, which applies to few characters in *The Witcher* story. As a bearer of the Elder Blood, her bloodline is immensely powerful and dangerous to other races, namely humans. The Scoia'tael group, mentioned earlier, wants to capture one of these descendants and use their power for their further actions against humans.

To sum up, the ground-breaking interracial union of Lara Dorren and Cregennan of Lod holds significant narrative weight, shows similarities to historical events and to the common issues of contemporary interracial relationships as presented through the lens of sociological studies. Despite their transgression of societal norms, their relationship shows a potential for racial harmony. Regrettably, their attempts to propagate this perspective are met with disapproval from the human populace, culminating in the termination of their

relationship. Thus, their interracial marriage eventually perpetuates the enduring animosity between the two races.

3.3. Interracial Couples: Geralt of Rivia and Yennefer of Vengerberg

Geralt of Rivia and Yennefer of Vengerberg are the central protagonists in *The Witcher*, who, together with their complex relationship, stay also in the centre of the fans' attention. Their enduring bond, despite societal prejudices, not only drives the narrative but also challenges and critiques the discriminatory attitudes prevalent in their world.

Geralt of Rivia, the central character in *The Witcher* series, embodies a complex blend of stoicism, pragmatism, and moral ambiguity. His importance lies in his role as a 'witcher', a monster hunter, which positions him at the intersection of human society and the supernatural world. Geralt of Rivia's identity as a witcher, a marginalised race in *The Witcher* society, is a fundamental aspect of his character, shaping his abilities, emotional state, and societal role. He is characterised as a strong man, with distinguishing features such as long white hair, dark eyes reminiscent of a feline's, and numerous facial scars.

In the books, he is portrayed as a morally ambiguous character who is neither a hero nor an anti-hero (Michalska 2020, 28). Furthermore, according to Selis Yıldız Şen, although the Witcher is a professional monster-killer, it is important that he categorises monsters differently from other people who are likely to make one-sided conclusions and favour one group over another.

Geralt may be seen as a person who kills humans, or rather "human shaped monsters", but, in his opinion, humans are one of many species, just like non-humans and other creatures (Şen 2023, 65). When all this is combined with his cold and closed personality, we get a unique character with no historical predecessor, but who still has some traditional hero traits (Gawroński and Bajorek 2020, 3).

Despite his formidable combat skills, Geralt of Rivia's witcher lineage subjects him to persistent discrimination, resulting in a profound sense of loneliness and rejection. This fosters moments of self-doubt and introspection in him, thereby humanising his character.

Yennefer of Vengerberg is the second main character of the saga and the only character to whom Geralt truly shows affection. Yennefer, or Yen, firstly appears in *The Last Wish*. Andrzej Sapkowski comments on Yennefer's character creation in an interview: "I am convinced that only with contact with the other sex – whether it is cause of attraction, care, confrontation or opposition – a hero can fully grow. When I created Yennefer's character, I wanted Geralt to fully grow, but then I decided to make things complicated. I created a female character who refuses to be a fantasy stereotype" (Cutali 2015). Her popularity stems not only from her unique personality but also from her distinctive looks. She is described as a seductive woman with pale skin, long black hair, and vibrant purple eyes, who has a mysterious aura around her. Her "profession" as a sorceress marks her personal life as well as her views on the world. Yennefer is a mage of the Lodge of Sorceresses. Mages, especially females, have a strong influence on the political scene in the story, but they are infertile.

In general, mages exist to help ordinary people in many ways, for example, politics, medicine, and many other fields. Some people look down on sorceresses and do not accept them in society. Sometimes, mages are targeted and discriminated against for their magical abilities, usually by people who fear them, but the majority of citizens perceive them with respect and use the services provided by the sorceresses.

The relationship between Geralt and Yennefer plays a central role in *The Witcher*. They first meet in the second half of *The Last Wish*, and after this, their fates become intertwined. In the story, Geralt is looking for help, as his companion, Dandelion, was affected by a djinn, whose curse could be lifted by a mage only. This is the first time when Geralt first learns about Yennefer. When they first meet, the sorceress is highly interested in Geralt's racial traits, as she has never seen a witcher in her life before, so she asks various questions about his physical and magical abilities. However, Geralt does not feel comfortable with this, as he is not used to people being interested in witchers, let alone in their skills and physique.

As mentioned earlier, witchers are discriminated against by the majority of people, mostly for their unique appearance. Witchers usually avoid people and Geralt is not any different. This stems from a certain side story, in which Geralt wants to help a girl named Renfri, yet he kills her in the end. From this point, he tries to avoid any type of companionship, as his actions left him with a nickname "Butcher of Blaviken", which casts him as a fearsome figure, leading people to approach him with caution or outright fear. His reputation precedes him, influencing how others perceive and engage with him. His solitude leads to Geralt not having almost anyone to share his feelings with.

However, there is one occasion when he is able to talk with others without fear of being discriminated against.

The fellowship among witchers is a recurring theme. Typically, they return to their keeps periodically, sharing experiences and finding solace in their shared understanding. This tradition is evident both in the books and the Netflix series. During his travels, Geralt usually avoids any type of companionship in order to not make more trouble for witchers' reputation. However, upon reaching Kaer Morhen, his behaviour shifts dramatically, emphasising the significance of this place in his life. In the second season of the TV series, the change in Geralt's behaviour is more obvious, when he returns to Kaer Morhen. He is happy to see how many witchers survived another year and it is visible that they are like family to him.

As mentioned earlier, mages also face issues with discrimination, because of their practices. Similarly, Yennefer rather spends time in Aretuza, where she was raised, as this is the only place where all sorceresses gather during challenging times. In the TV series, even though Yennefer hates the place for "stealing" her fertility, she still thinks of it as her home, because she is able to meet all her friends there.

Both Geralt's and Yennefer's behaviour may be interpreted as self-segregation. The term describes the separation or withdrawal from social interactions with the dominant racial group due to concerns about discrimination, prejudice, or safety. According to Nguyen, minority groups such as Hispanics, prefer to live in co-ethnics neighbourhoods and their choice of residencies depends on the prejudices and discrimination present within the group (Nguyen 2004).

As Feller (2023, 170) observes, Geralt is a depiction of Polish or Eastern-European "Otherness," embodying the problem to live "normally" among (Western-European) humans. This makes it difficult for him to stay in one place for a long time, because he is always perceived as the "Other" in the community. People do not want anyone "different" in their community, even if the individual would be beneficial for them. This is the reason Geralt and other witchers choose to be alone and live separated from humans.

After Yennefer learnt about Geralt's situation, she makes a plan to use the djinn and cure her infertility with it. Yet, it does not work, as Geralt is the djinn's master, about which Yennefer does not know. As she tries to make a wish, Geralt also makes a wish, the last wish, resulting in their lives becoming intertwined until their deaths. The witcher's wish is a mystery, since there is no clear statement, what he wishes for, but one of many speculations claims that he wished to die side by side with the sorceress:

> "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. Condemned yourself to me." (Sapkowski 2007, 145)

This was also the first time when Geralt shows true affection to someone, which is highly important since witchers should not be able to feel any emotions because of their mutations.

After this fateful event, Geralt and Yennefer go through many breakups and comebacks as they are both searching for the core element behind their love. Eventually, it turns out that the one thing that connects the witcher and the sorceress is the difficulty to accept someone else in their lives. They have always believed that they do not deserve love, since one is a cold-blooded monster killer, and the other is supposed to be a royal advisor who should not think about things such as "love". The problem in their relationship lies in the fact that both want to feel loved and important to the other, yet they withdraw from each other's company as a form of protection.

Similarly, this happens in real-world multiracial relationships, as well. A study named *Better together? Interracial Relationships and Depressive Symptoms* investigates depressive symptoms in individuals who are transitioning into intraracial and interracial relationships. The results show that in certain cases, the psychological burdens resulting from discrimination and racism faced by one partner can affect the other partner as well, potentially diminishing the emotional advantages typically associated with marriage and cohabitation (Wong and Penner 2018). Generally, the union may not benefit the partners as much, and the partnership ends quicker for the reasons stated above. This is portrayed via Geralt's fear of being discriminated:

Previously, when they lived together and things were good between them, Yennefer had wanted to attend assemblies and conclaves with him at her side. At that time, he steadfastly refused. He was convinced he would be treated by the sorcerers at best as a freak and a spectacle, and at worst as an intruder and a pariah. Yennefer scoffed at his fears but had never

insisted. Since in other situations, she was capable of insisting until the house shook and windows shattered, that had confirmed Geralt's belief that his decision had been right. (Sapkowski 2013, 88)

Geralt eventually leaves Yennefer, as he fears that similar situations would occur on an everyday basis and so he stops believing in their future. Geralt would be able to stay if he was sure about not being persecuted by others. Yennefer's reactions become clear in the *Sword of Destiny* as she feels betrayed by the witcher:

"Those four years left their mark, Geralt. I'm over it now, which is the only reason why I didn't spit in your eyes during today's encounter. But don't let my civility deceive you." (Sapkowski 2015, 37)

We can see a slight change in Geralt's behaviour towards others, insofar as he starts to care more about people who are close to him. The feelings he experiences are contradictory with his witcher training and they also change his overall attitudes, beliefs, and views. This is another common marker in interracial relationships: individuals who engage in such relationships expose themselves to a broader spectrum of cultures and lifestyles, which necessitates a level of openness, honesty, and vulnerability on the part of these individuals and their families (Kerney 2021, 27).

In the *Sword of Destiny*, Geralt meets Istredd, Yennefer's lover from the past. Istredd wants Geralt to leave Yennefer and tells him that witchers should not feel any emotions:

"You're a mutant. Don't understand me wrongly. I don't say it to insult you or show you contempt. I merely state a fact. You're a mutant, and one of the basic traits of your mutation is utter insensitivity to emotions. You were created like that, in order to do your job. Do you understand? You cannot feel anything. What you take for emotion is cellular, somatic memory, if you know what those words mean." (Sapkowski 2015, 100)

This conversation shows the people's view on witchers, as they truly doubt that witchers are capable of loving someone. The witcher then talks with Yennefer about Istredd's claims:

"And the fact that I'm saddened… the fact that I know I'm losing you… is cellular memory. The atavistic remnants of feelings in a mutant purged of emotion—"

"I can't stand it when you talk like that!" she exploded. "I can't bear it when you use that word. Don't ever use it again in my presence. Never!"

"Does it change the fact? After all, I am a mutant." (103)

[…]

"You don't know?" he smiled sadly. "My answer would just be a word. A word which doesn't express a feeling, doesn't express an emotion, because I'm bereft of them." (105)

It is obvious that Geralt at this point begins to doubt himself and his identity. This is also a major change in his character, as he has never thought about such things.

In the Netflix adaptation, Geralt also confronts his own racial identity multiple times, expressing uncertainties about his status as a Witcher. During a retrospection about his origins as a Witcher, Geralt recounts the moment when he slew his first monster. The individual he rescued was so terrified of Geralt that she fainted. This experience shatters Geralt's idealistic view of being a hero; instead, he finds himself treated as a monster. Consequently, he abandons his heroic aspirations and tries to refrain from interfering in people's lives. (Hissrich, 2019, S01:E01, 37:05)

On the other hand, Geralt is an embodiment of an in-between or "grey" character. Michalska describes him as "an outcast and 'the other' [who is] unable to find his place in a society" (2020, 9). As Feller (2023, 173) states, monsters in *The Witcher* represent the Slavic cultural heritage, for example, the striga, which is described as a mutated overgrown foetus, mirroring Slavic repressed memories. Geralt exists to slay these monsters and as he does, he also erases these Slavic roots (Alvestad 2023, 9; Feller 2023, 173). Imre (2023, 1580) confirms that "The Witcher is a fantasy figure, who represents a nation of split identity, in this case, Poland. His hybrid constitution of a human and a monster 'mimics' that of contemporary Polish intellectuals, 'simultaneously appreciating aesthetic qualities of the local culture and modelling themselves after their Western counterparts.'" Majkowski (2021) adds that Geralt is "a paradoxical figure: the most human of monsters." All this confirms Geralt's identity issues that I described above.

Identity issues are common in interracial relationships. One example is visible in *The Witcher* TV series. In episode six of the first season, Geralt and Yennefer engage in a dialogue about their respective races and explore the hypothetical scenario of leading human lives. This conversation underscores the complexities of their identities and their relationship within the context of their racially diverse world. This way of thinking may be interpreted as an ethnic identity crisis. The ethnic identity is formed by society the individual lives in. However, not every ethnic identity is accepted by the society, therefore, the individual has to choose what ethnic identity they want to be referred to as. Once they fail to choose socially acknowledged identity, the individual may find themselves in an identity crisis, which leads them to fight for their place in society (Benoy 2015, 353).

Another problem in the relationship between Geralt and Yennefer comes when the witcher and Istredd almost fight with each other. Because of this, Yennefer decides to leave both men behind as she does not want to choose between them. The prejudices from Istredd thus ruin this relationship between the witcher and the sorceress.

Interracial Relationships: The History, Growth, and Effects on Individuals and Society observes that individuals in interracial relationships may begin to feel confused about their own identity, mainly because of fear of discrimination. These feelings may grow into anger, self-isolation, even a breakup, or they may be more encouraged to educate others on the topic. The only way to change this is to consciously make an effort to challenge false information and stereotypes, which are usually learned from an individual's surroundings. These prejudices about certain races are then thought to be

unchangeable and the information is hard to prove false. Only by actively learning about and empathising with individuals of all races and backgrounds can lead to positive change (Kerney 2021, 38). Zebrovski also observes in his study that the well-being of couples or individual partners is significantly impacted, positively and negatively, by the people in their immediate environment (1999, 124). The research examines how race and gender influence the approval or disapproval of interracial marriages between Black and White individuals in the U.S. It emphasises the role of family, community, and daily social interactions in the experiences of interracial couples.

The same phenomenon is discernible within the narrative of *The Witcher*. As previously noted, Witchers are subjected to societal discrimination, with the bias predominantly focusing on their perceived negative attributes, such as their mutations and alleged ruthlessness. This discriminatory attitude is not exclusive to Witchers; other races within the narrative also experience similar prejudice. However, certain racial groups have managed to assimilate into human society over time, a feat that Witchers have yet to achieve. Geralt, a prominent Witcher, has been a recipient of this discriminatory behaviour since his formative years. Nevertheless, he has developed the capacity to disregard these societal prejudices. The introduction of Yennefer into his life, however, exacerbates his fear of discrimination, a fear that is not only directed towards him but also towards Yennefer. This fear is actualized during his confrontation with Istredd, culminating in the termination of their relationship. This incident serves as a stark reminder of the pervasive nature of discrimination within their society.

Geralt and Yennefer's relationship is full of breakups and comebacks. As studies show, compared to same-race relationships, interracial unions are more likely to end after a shorter period of time. Furthermore, these relationships are less likely to end up in cohabitation or marriage (Anderson 2014, 6). If the partners do marry, it is more likely that the marriage will end about 1.4 years earlier than in intraracial marriages (Anderson 2014, 11). This may be the reason Geralt and Yennefer take so many breaks, sometimes involuntarily. As their relationship is unstable, they also have to deal with other problems in their lives, and taking a break serves as an anchor. They both have time to think things over and decide what they want.

Both in Geralt's and Yennefer's case, their social backgrounds and race define their lives since their youths. Geralt is confused with himself as his race should not be able to feel any emotions. He is perceived as cold, ruthless, and emotionless by the majority of people, which should be normal according to his training. Yennefer, in her capacity as a sorceress, ought to prioritise political and legal affairs, thereby relegating personal matters and relational bonds to secondary importance. There are instances in which, for example, Yennefer chooses to help the Brotherhood of Sorceress to protect their group beliefs. In the TV series, this heavily impacts the relationship, as Yennefer gets lost in action and Geralt thinks she died.

3.4. Interracial Adoption: Geralt, Yennefer and Ciri

The last important aspect of Geralt's and Yennefer's relationship is the sorceress's wish to have a child. Since Yennefer had to become infertile for the sake of her magic, she wants to revert that curse. Geralt knows about her dream, yet he cannot give her a child since he, as a witcher, is also sterile.

The fact that both characters are infertile adds to the complexity of their relationship. However, it is precisely at this juncture that the author defies conventional expectations. When Geralt's path intersects with that of Ciri, a gifted young girl, the narrative challenges prevailing stereotypes by questioning the assumption that witchers or mages are incapable of caring for children.

Princess Cirilla, or Ciri, plays a pivotal role in the relationship between the witcher and the sorceress. She is a granddaughter of Queen Calanthe, the ruler of Cintra, and also a successor of the throne. Furthermore, she is a descendant of Lara Dorren, which means that she has Elder Blood.

Her crucial impact on Geralt's and Yennefer's relationship is "The Law of Surprise," a recurring motif within *The Witcher* saga. This legal custom binds individuals by destiny, often resulting in unexpected connections. Notably, Geralt's encounter with Yennefer originates from such a twist of fate. However, a subsequent instance of the Law of Surprise introduces a profound shift. When Geralt claims Ciri as his destiny, it transcends mere happenstance. For Geralt and Yennefer, this unexpected turn of events presents an almost impossible opportunity: the prospect of caring for a child of their own. The Law of Surprise, in this context, becomes a conduit for hope, challenging

established norms and offering the lovers a chance at parenthood – a privilege they had long deemed unattainable.

Ciri's adoption, as described in the novels, shows similarities to real-life interracial adoptions and single-father difficulties. Interracial adoption in the U.S. was a problematic process until 1997, insofar as adoptions were based on the "matching" system. Since then, many regulations have been made in order to promote colour-blind adoption, although there are still agencies which continue to use racial categories in their marketing practices (Sweeney 2013, 43). Interracial adoption refers to the process in which an individual or a family chooses to adopt a child whose race and ethnicity differ from their own (Mackey 2024, 4).

Mackey's study focuses on the impact of interracial adoption on adoptees' racial and ethnic identity, self-esteem, parent-child relationships, and overall well-being. One of the main problems of interracial adoptions is the discrimination towards the adoptees' new background or the adoptees themselves. This relates to the assimilation of adoptees, which is often viewed as forced. Children adopted into a different race or background are thought to lose their links to their original culture and community (Mackey 2024, 9).

Such problems show in *The Witcher* as well when Cirilla must suddenly leave her home and she has to adapt to a new life with Geralt. Ciri experiences the dangerous life of the witcher and feels lost in his world. Although she believes that her social status keeps her safe, Geralt does not share her opinion: he knows that after Queen Calanthe died, Ciri now is viewed as an object which would help anyone to get the throne of Cintra and then they would dispose of her. Another issue connected with the assimilation process is Ciri's

power development. She suddenly discovers her talents as a strong medium, which shows her ancestry of Elder Blood. Ciri now has two identities: she is an heir to the throne of Cintra, but she is also a powerful descendant of the Elder Blood, which makes her life more dangerous.

Ciri's assimilation to her new life in hiding is highlighted by the life at Kaer Morhen, where Geralt takes her, as he believes she would be safe there. Ciri is now the only girl in a fortress full of witchers, thus, she fears them in the beginning and the only person whom she can trust is Geralt. Despite his personality and racial status, Geralt claims Ciri as an adoptive daughter and tries to protect her as much as possible. He shows more emotions and begins to learn how to be a better guardian.

As mentioned earlier, the adoptees or their foster parents may face discrimination from their surroundings. In the saga, there are instances when ordinary people discriminate against witchers, for their mutations and lack of emotions, but also towards other non-humans. Geralt is used to this and does not care about it, but Ciri is not familiar with this behaviour and has to become used to it as she spends more time with the witcher.

Another issue mentioned by Mackey (2024) is that the adoptees in interracial families may also face mental health challenges because of the losses of cultural backgrounds and the potential trauma resulting from the loss of their previous home (2024, 6). This shows in the fantasy world of *The Witcher* when Ciri has to suddenly leave her home after it is attacked by the Nilfgaardian army. She suffers from nightmares about the attack and the death of queen Calanthe, who was her only family at the time. Ciri also finds out about the Nilfgaardians, who want to kill her so they can take the throne of

Cintra. She is scared and lonely until she is found by the merchant and reunites with Geralt, who takes her to Kaer Morhen. Thus, Ciri goes through a transition from her regular and peaceful human surroundings to the world of another race, supernatural beings whose lives are devastated by wars.

Another important aspect of the adoption is that Yennefer has not been with Ciri from the beginning and has not known about her. Ciri, therefore, is missing a mother figure in her life. Shipe et al. (2022) demonstrate that single fathers in real life tend to live below the poverty line, and they often identify as Latino or African American. As for their parenting skills, they are often stereotyped based on their gender and race, and so they are seen as more prone to have problems with taking care of their children (Shipe et. al. 2022, 21). Fathers in these families tend to have unstable housing or mental health problems. Their children are more likely to have behaviour problems, to use substances and to have limited access to healthcare services (Shipe et. al. 2022, 23).

Similar difficulties are portrayed in *The Witcher* universe when Ciri lives at Kaer Morhen. The witchers train Ciri to fight while giving her various potions to suppress physiological changes in her body or to lessen the pain. Ciri is forced to live as the witchers, who are used to a rough lifestyle, while Ciri has been treated as a princess her whole life. Ciri would need a mother figure in her life. The maternal role is firstly played by Triss Ranuncul, who takes care of the princess mainly when they are at Kaer Morhen. However, after an accident, Geralt sends for Yennefer, who is the only person to help Ciri to learn and control her magical powers.

The initial correspondence between Geralt and Yennefer, after a hiatus of three years, is marked by Geralt's letter about Ciri. Their first encounter occurs at the temple of Melitele during Ciri's educational period, where Yennefer undertakes the responsibility of instructing the princess in managing her abilities. Subsequently, a familial bond is established among Yennefer, Ciri, and Geralt, significantly alleviating uncertainties surrounding the relationship between the witcher and the sorceress. This bond provides a sense of fulfilment in their lives.

In *Time of Contempt*, Ciri becomes the connection between the witcher and the sorceress as they both find their destiny through Ciri. Geralt and Yennefer talk to each other again, after their long separation. From that juncture, Geralt and Yennefer discover their bond, facilitated by Ciri. The novel provides a lucid depiction of their altered perspective towards the future. Despite his identity as a witcher, the interracial problems and his temporarily single-father role in the adoption, Geralt envisions a permanent and strong bond with his family.

The ending of the family is presented in *Lady of the Lake* (2017): "Yennefer already had a clear enough picture of the situation to know that what was happening in Rivia wasn't a fire, or a raid by enemy troops, but a pogrom" (Sapkowski 2017, 458). During these events, Geralt and Yennefer are not together and the witcher ends up deathly wounded in the battle because he himself is a monster. In the end, he is still considered as "the Other" by humans, even though he was created by them. As Yennefer wants to help Geralt, she also becomes a target of rioting humans who want to kill all non-humans present. A few pages

later it seems that Geralt dies from his wounds after Yennefer's unsuccessful attempts to heal him.

The future of the family remains somewhat open to the readers' interpretation. We only know that Geralt finds himself and Yennefer, somewhere unknown, after Ciri has teleported them. In the very end of the book, it is mentioned that they get married, but there is no clear information about what happens after. The only thing known is that Ciri is not with them, as she stays in a different world.

4. Conclusion

In Andrzej Sapkowski's *The Witcher* series, the exploration of multiculturalism and its associated issues is intricately portrayed in interracial relationships. The franchise tackles topics such as race, discrimination, multiracial politics, and adoption in a complex manner. Through a sociological and historical lens, my analysis has explained that interracial relationships not only drive the narrative of *The Witcher* saga, but they also challenge discriminatory attitudes and prejudices, mirroring contemporary real-world dynamics.

While previous researchers view *The Witcher* series through the Slavic versus Western European (Gawroński and Bajorek 2020, 1; Majkowski 2018; Majkowski 2021) and populist versus non-populist dichotomies (Imre 2023), mostly claiming it serves colonial ideologies and Polish populist propaganda, I propose a different, and somewhat broader, perspective. Beyond Slavic cultural issues and mythology, the saga delves into the contemporary multicultural world with multifaceted problems.

The first chapter examines race and multiculturalism in fantasy literature, drawing insights from Helen Young's *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness.* As Young states, although whiteness is a standard setting of many fantasies (2016, 1), contemporary authors leverage the fantasy genre to address diverse topics and propose solutions (2016, 4). In my reading, *The Witcher* book and film series serve as a good example for this recent trend in fantasy.

Elven-Human relationships emerge as a central theme in *The Witcher* saga, paralleling the colonization of America. Notably, the interracial relationship between elven sorceress Lara Dorren and human mage Cregennan of Lod shows a similarity to the historical marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe. Furthermore,

the fictional couple's story displays the challenges faced by contemporary interracial couples: public stigmatization, familial disapproval, and relational marginalization. Despite all these challenges, the plotline of Lara and Cregennan proves that racial harmony – temporarily at least – is possible. Unfortunately, human accusations of treason lead to Cregennan's demise, fueling animosity between the two races.

Geralt and Yennefer's multiracial relationship follows suit and confirms this. Geralt, an outsider due to discrimination against his race, grapples with the impact on their lives and personalities. However, despite the prejudice about witchers being emotionless monsters, the more Geralt is with Yennefer, the more his feelings, emotions and views develop. The final cue to this character development comes with Ciri, whom Geralt takes as his adoptee. She helps to reforge the relationship, while she learns more about the magical world and assimilates. She helps both partners to discover new ways of life and to think about relationships differently.

Further research could find additional complex racial problematics in the saga, focussing, for example, on the dwarves' plight, which mirrors that of Jews, experiencing ghettos and suffering from pogroms. Analysing the games in detail could also bring further insights into this topic. Yet, my thesis has demonstrated that *The Witcher* series transcends mere folklore, offering profound insights into our multicultural world.

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