ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI'S WITCHER SERIES: FANTASY'S

APPROPRIATION OF MODERN POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT

Andrzej Sapkowski's Witcher Series: Fantasy's Appropriation of Modern Political Landscapes

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The *Witcher* series, by Andrzej Sapkowski, has recently become an international phenomenon. On top of its international pop-cultural success, one of the most interesting aspects about the series is the political landscape of the world, specifically in regards to politics and magic.

From the very beginning of the series, Sapkowski interweaves very specific politico-legal philosophies through the world's government systems, some of the most prominent of which are Naturalism and Positivism. This is done in his creation of the loose coalition of northern kingdoms, typically embodying Naturalism, being put into conflict with the authoritarian southern empire, which typically embodies Positivism. In addition to this, Sapkowski also uses different historical philosophies of real-world government systems in the systems he creates for his world.

In addition to the politico-legal philosophies embedded within the government systems in the series, Sapkowski also organizes politics and magic in very particular ways. For example, the magical community is, for all intents and purposes, divided by male and female magic users (enchanters and enchantresses respectively), each with their own functions in the magical community and world at large; enchanters dominate fields such as scientific, magical, and academic research, while enchantresses dominate fields such as politics and other governmental affairs. In addition to this, Sapkowski grants enchanters and enchantresses a sort of religious rhetoric that allows them to navigate through both religious and secular political landscapes.

In using historical government philosophies in creating his own governments, Sapkowski is keeping up a long-standing tradition of fantasy being affected by, as well as having the capability to affect, pop-culture and politics. His government systems within the series are reflected by real-world politico-legal philosophies, and because it has had such an impact on pop-culture, it could very well impact the political realm of western society as other popular fantasy series have done.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 20th century, fantasy literature by Western authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, George R. R. Martin, and J. K. Rowling has worked its way into nearly every facet of Western society, being adapted from their original books into graphic novels, art, television, games, songs, and more. Recently, however, a new work of fantasy has worked its way into pop-culture; one that not only has its origins outside of Western Europe, but also seeks to delve into the realm of politico-legal philosophy: the Witcher Series by Andrzej Sapkowski. This series has found its origins in quite a peculiar way, being written by a Polish man just after the fall of the iron curtain.

The first book of Sapkowski's series, *Blood of Elves*, occurs shortly after a southern empire called Nilfgaard has sacked a northern bordering kingdom called Cintra. Not only has Nilfgaard laid waste to nearly all of the land, but the queen of Cintra has killed herself and ordered her only heir, young Princess Cirilla (Ciri for short), to be smuggled out of the kingdom and given to a man named Geralt, a specialized monster hunter called a witcher. However, due to the political position which Ciri holds, the emperor of Nilfgaard, Emhyr var Emreis, sends spies in order to track down and kidnap her for the empire. Eventually, Geralt takes Ciri to Kaer Morhen, home of the witchers, and they begin to raise her. Soon, however, the witchers discover Ciri prophesying and displaying signs of magic, so they decide to send her to a convent school. Shortly after Ciri arrives at the convent, an enchantress named Yennefer (an intermittent love interest of Geralt's, who Ciri comes to think of as her adopted mother) is called to help raise and teach Ciri how to control her magical abilities.

The next book, *Time of Contempt*, picks up with Yennefer escorting Ciri to a school for enchantresses on an island called Thaenedd, still avoiding Nilfgaardian spies. At this same time, there is also an international meeting of enchanters and enchantresses gathered in order to make important political decisions concerning how to deal with the threat of the Nilfgaardian empire to the northern kingdoms. During the journey Ciri, Yennefer, and Geralt are reunited, and all three go to Thaenedd. After they arrive, however, there is an insurrection of the Conclave on Thaenedd by a splinter group consisting primarily of enchantresses. Simultaneously, another attack begins on another side of Thaenedd originally thought to have been by Nilfgaard, but later revealed to have been a plot of the northern governments in order to persuade the magical community to decide to fight against Nilfgaard. In addition to this, because of the tumult on Thaenedd, Nilfgaardian spies infiltrate the island and attempt to kidnap Ciri. Finally, an enchanter named Vilgefortz also pursues Ciri, because of her ancestry and her role in a prophesy about the end of the world. Due to all of the chaos happening on Thaenedd at once, Ciri is lost by everyone (being teleported to a desert by an unstable magical portal which collapses immediately after), the Conclave collapses, Geralt is permanently injured and nearly beaten to death in a battle with Vilgefortz, and massive political upheaval ensues, causing tensions between Nilfgaard and the northern kingdoms to rapidly escalate until all-out war breaks out between the empire and the kingdoms. At the very end of the novel, Ciri is found in southern Nilfgaard by a group of thieves who call themselves the "Rats."

After the cataclysmic events occurring in *Time of Contempt*, Sapkowski continues his epic narrative in *Baptism of Fire*. Geralt begins a journey to rescue Ciri, gaining several companions along the way who help him in his quest. Furthermore, after the fall of the Conclave, a group of enchantresses establishes a new magical order called the "Lodge," intended to protect

the interests of magic. All the while, war with Nilfgaard begins to ravage the northern kingdoms. During this time, Ciri becomes an official member of the "Rats," and they wreak havoc on various Nilfgaardian towns. Meanwhile, Yennefer (who had suspiciously disappeared after the events on Thaenedd) is revealed to have been transformed into a sort of figurine by an enchantress. Yennefer is then brought to the Lodge, and invited to join. She refuses and escapes in order to search for Ciri, as well as to begin an investigation into the plans and whereabouts of Vilgefortz.

Sapkowski begins *The Tower of Swallows*, the next book of the series, with Ciri having been discovered badly injured by a hermit named Vysogota who treats her wounds. While Ciri stays with Vysogota, she tells him about her time with the Rats. Through Ciri's story, Sapkowski reveals that a merciless bounty hunter named Bonhart has been sent after them. Having realized who Ciri is, Bonhart has killed the rest of the Rats and taken Ciri. Eventually she escaped, yet again, was lost, and discovered by Vysogota. Ciri eventually leaves Vysogota, and begins her quest to find Geralt and Yennefer. Meanwhile, Geralt and company make their way across Nilfgaard, attempting (often unsuccessfully) to avoid the conflicts between Nilfgaard and the northern kingdoms. Eventually, they reach Toussaint, a fairytale-esque duchy in the Nilfgaardian empire where they are given asylum. Yennefer also continues her search for Ciri and Vilgefortz respectively, and at the end of the novel, Yennefer, yet again, disappears.

In the fifth book of the series, *The Lady of the Lake*, Geralt and company, after having spent the winter in Toussaint, resume their quest to find Ciri. Sapkowski reveals that Yennefer has disappeared because she was sucked into a portal in the middle of the ocean which took her to Vilgefortz's hideout, where she is taken prisoner and abused by the enchanter. Ciri continues her search for Geralt and Yennefer, while continuing to run from Nilfgaardian spies and Bonhart.

At this point Ciri becomes lost in space and time, traveling to various planets in various time periods. Sapkowski's narrative then leaps into the distant future of the world, following two enchantresses named Abonde and Nimue who are trying to uncover the events taking place throughout this book, which have been distorted in times past by the Lodge. Eventually, Geralt, Yennefer, and Ciri battle Vilgefortz and his allies in order to be reunited with each other. After this battle, the three protagonists are discovered and surrounded by the Nilfgaardian emperor and his army who reveals his true identity to them, and (surprisingly) decides to leave all three in peace. Finally, Nilfgaard and the northern kingdoms go to battle, ending in loss for the Nilfgaardian army.

Throughout this politically charged series, Sapkowski chooses to interweave all of the novels with a juxtaposition between two main legal philosophies of our modern western world: Naturalism and Positivism. This interweaving of politico-legal philosophies is a significant part of what makes the Witcher novels stand out within the large body of fantasy media. Furthermore, while Sapkowski characterizes his governments by using real political philosophies, he does not create governments that are allegorical.

Another striking feature of the series is the role magic plays within the world and how it functions. Magic typically lies within the power of characters Sapkowski calls enchanters and enchantresses, with each gender having a different role to play within the realm of magic. Enchanters are mainly concerned with the study, development, and experimentation of magic, while enchantresses are primarily concerned with the use of magic within politics, and the world at large. With this split in magical responsibility, Sapkowski calls into question the morality and ethicality of current politico-legal philosophies in an exponentially advancing technological society. Furthermore, Sapkowski has chosen to convey magic as a sort of replacement of

traditional religion within the series, thus giving magic a certain religious-esque rhetorical influence.

Interestingly, throughout the entire narrative, Sapkowski invites his readers to critically think about a number of politico-legal situations. Thus, he joins a significant group of authors who use their work to influence society at large; furthermore, fantasy often has an effect on pop-culture, whether it be intentional or not. This is especially true of popular fantasies such as *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter*, which have been shown to have a direct impact on pop-culture and politics.

1. POLITICO-LEGAL PHILOSOPHIES IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH

Sapkowski adapts western politico-legal philosophies in the Witcher series and highlights their function throughout the series' basic conflicts. Not only are a number of government styles and conflicts posited throughout the narrative, but legal philosophies are put forth in an effort to make the reader understand the basic premises behind the differing government systems. The main philosophies Sapkowski incorporates are Naturalism and Positivism, both embodied throughout the history of western politics and law making. Naturalism is the idea that a law is only truly a law when it is seen as moral and/or ethical by any given society and/or judge (due to the subjective nature of morals and ethics, this can look different). A prime example of Naturalism is the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" outlined in the United States' Declaration of Independence. In the Witcher series the northern kingdoms, the magical Conclave (a group of enchanters and enchantresses who essentially govern magical society), and the Lodge (a group of enchantresses who are concerned with the overall wellbeing of magic) all tend to favor a more Naturalistic legal philosophy. Significantly, all of these have a direct tie to power in magic (whether it be its members or the magical advisory positions enchanters and enchantresses most commonly take in the northern kingdoms). Conversely, Positivism is the idea that law is only law if it has been posited as such; in other words, a law must be written and accepted as such by a government for it to be a law, no matter if it violates any moral or ethical beliefs held by the government or society at large. An example of this is the nature of precedence used throughout U.S. legal history. In Sapkowski's novels, these philosophies are mostly embodied by larger governments and agencies that enforce laws on a macro scale. In this

context, the philosophical underpinnings help establish the differences among governments within the world of the Witcher.

The series begins with the introduction of characters in the northern kingdoms, which tend to embody a more Naturalist philosophy towards law and governance. This is made evident early on in *Time of Contempt*, when a street priest is preaching to a crowd about the evils of magic, stating that "[t]here is but one law in the world! . . . Divine law! The whole of nature is subject to that law, the whole of earth and everything that lives on the earth!" (70). This is an excellent introduction to Naturalism within the series, as not only does the quote imply laws that are found within the moral scope of religious law, but the religious undertone of this moment is also an exceedingly fitting one, because the idea of Natural Law was first conceived by St. Thomas Aquinas (a Catholic Apologist who lived circa 1225-1274). This is especially interesting because, centuries after their deaths, the politically and magically powerful members of the Lodge are referred to using religious terminology in the future such as "St Philipa of Mons Calvus" and "Martyr Sisters." While the introduction of Natural Law in the series is a fitting one, a more prominent example of the usage of Natural Law takes place in *The Tower of Swallows*, when Crach an Craite (the Yarl of Skellige, a small kingdom) vows to send Yennefer back for punishment at the hands of the law, then decides against it because Yennefer reminds him of a vow both took to act in Ciri's best interest. Later, the reader finds out that Yennefer, who is clearly not a prisoner, is eating lobster with the Yarl of Skellige, as he (evidently) has agreed to help her in her search for Ciri. This is one of the most blatant examples of Naturalism throughout the series due to the fact that while (for all intents and purposes) the ruler of the Skelligan isles is bound to hand Yennefer over to one of the other Northern Kingdoms due to the supposed actions she took on Thaenedd (supposedly causing the insurrection of the original conclave of

enchanters and enchantresses), Crach on Craite recognizes a moral duty both he and Yennefer have towards Ciri, thus causing him to disregard the Skelligan's alliance with the other Northern Kingdoms.

Throughout the Witcher series, Naturalism is found in abundance where magic is most politically powerful. For example, throughout *Time of Contempt*, while there is a bureaucratic framework for the magical conclave (before the insurrection) most decisions are decided based upon a debate which primarily concerns morals. These debates are revealed to be especially important when Sabrina Glevissig (another enchantress who holds political power) is talking to Yennefer about politics: "Tomorrow, at the Council, we'll be politicking [sic] until it comes out of our ears. And we'll hear plenty of moralising [sic], too. About the need for peaceful coexistence. . . About the necessity to adopt a loyal position regarding plans and ambitions of our kings… Oh, politics, and those endless debates" (113). Sabrina's comments about the political debates the members of the Conclave will be having reveal that the members are responsible for making moral and ethical political decisions for the entire magical community. When the Lodge of Sorceresses (or more simply, the Lodge) is formed in *Baptism of Fire*, the goals Philipa states even pertain to the moral obligation to uphold the very thing that gives enchanters and enchantresses power, magic: "[The Lodge's] initiative is intended to be utterly apolitical; that is its fundamental premise. We shall not be guided by interests of race, kingdoms, kings or imperators, but by the interests of magic and its future" (38). Philipa later stipulates that no matter the race or political affiliation, "[The members of the Lodge] shall decide together whether a convent of this kind will be founded at all. . . All of us. With equal rights" (40). These examples display Naturalism within the realm of magical politics in that it showcases the

inherent moralism that the established magical governing bodies obey: equal opportunity and rights.

Another prime example of Legal Naturalism can be seen in *Time of Contempt*, when Yennefer talks about the law put forth by the Conclave concerning the use of magic: "'To think,' snapped Yennefer, 'we have been forbidden from necromantic practices out of respect for the dignity of death and mortal remains; on the grounds that they deserve reverence, peace, and a ritual and ceremonial burial'" (50). While this section is just as imbued, if not more so, with the idea of Legal Naturalism, due to the moral and ethical nature stemming from the idea of having respect for the dead, this instance is markedly different from the one in *Tower of Swallows*, as it is used to limit the powers of magic users. In turn, this reveals that magical society governs what can and cannot be used for, as well as defines various aspects of morality in the use of magic. Furthermore, it must be noted that in the more Naturalist kingdoms of the North, the typical government advisor is often an enchantress (though there are some exceptions within the series), advising both moral and ethical decisions according to what she deems moral and ethical.

One of the more interesting aspects about magical politics and Naturalism is that magical political entities tend to be democratic; both the conclave (pre-insurrection) and the Lodge function on a basic democratic premise. The Conclave functions as a representative democracy, in which especially prominent enchanters and enchantresses are chosen to represent the overall magical community. Once these magical representatives are chosen, they then come together in order to debate and democratically vote on any given decision the overall magical community must make. Similarly, the (strictly female) Lodge is also a democratic organization, in that it requires a majority vote among its members in order to make any decisions; however, the Lodge does not choose its members in order to represent the magical community. This is quite different

from the way most magical governments are presented throughout the genre of fantasy. Michael

J. Whincop establishes the typical governing styles in fantasy, specifically in regards to magical

organizations:

> [This] model of governance we may call the hieratic model. This provides the
>
> opportunity for authors to explain and, more importantly, contextualise [sic] the
>
> practice of magic in an institutional setting. The *Lord of the Rings* involves
>
> elements of this hieratic model. It features an Order of Wizards, appointed to take
>
> an active part in the resistance against Sauron… *The Wizard of Earthsea* is a more
>
> explicitly hieratic society. Here, those with aptitude in magic are instructed, and
>
> take a necessary part in the functioning of a society. Thus the school for wizards
>
> on the island of Roke plays a prominent part in the governance of the lands of
>
> Earthsea. (Fable and Fantasy 100)

This is fascinating due to the fact that Sapkowski obeys none of these rules for magical

organization. Instead, he does the opposite, organizing the magical community into

democratically governing bodies.

Sapkowski's organization of magical governing bodies, as well as the typical

organization of those bodies within genre fantasy, is particularly interesting because (within the

Witcher series) both Naturalist and Democratic principles seem to be absent in societies who

subjugate their enchanters and enchantresses. The main example of this is the Southern

Nilfgaardian empire, which adheres to the Positivist view of law. The Nilfgaardian empire does

not work with magic users, but instead uses them as disposable tools. As a result of this

treatment, the enchanters and enchantress of the south have no magical political structure, and

they lack political power. This remains true until *Baptism of Fire*, when Assire var Anahid (an

enchantress from the Nilfgaardian empire) is invited to join the Lodge in order to contribute a southern magical perspective to the Lodge's decisions. After appearing at a Lodge meeting, Assire var Anahid addresses the members of the Lodge:

> No one knows that I am taking part in this meeting. I was asked to keep it secret, which I have done and will continue to do. For my own sake, as much as yours [the Lodge's]. For were it to come to light, I would not survive. That's the servility of the Empire's mages for you. We have the choice of servility or the scaffold. I took a risk. I did not come here as a spy. I can only prove it in one way: though my own death. It would be sufficient for the secrecy that our hostess is appealing for to be broken. It would be sufficient for news or our meeting to go beyond these walls, for me to lose my life. (35)

This is the perfect example of how both enchanters and enchantresses are treated in Nilfgaard. Not only are they denied any magical unification, but they are frequently used by the empire for espionage.

Sapkowski introduces Positivism in his novels when the Nilfgaardian governmental perspective comes more into play within the series: *Baptism of Fire*. He does this by setting up a meeting between Dijkstra (the head of the Redanian secret service as well as the "de facto governor of Redania") and the head of the Nilfgaardian secret service, Shilard Fitz-Oesterlen, right before war with Nilfgaard begins to ravage the northern kingdoms. Sapkowski introduces the idea of Positivism by writing the conversation held by these two to include a large amount of what is assumed to be legal jargon within the series. Latin phrases and terms, such as "fundamentum regnorum," and typically western ideas of governance, such as the idea of precedence, are littered throughout the chapter. Where this "legal jargon" becomes important is

when Shilard asks Dijkstra for the extradition of Cahir (a Nilfgaardian spy) from Redania to Nilfgaard:

> One may not deny the validity of your request…However, *primo*, those
>
> individuals are not in the Empire. And *secondo*, had they even reached it, there
>
> exists an impediment. Extradition is carried out on the basis of a judgement of the
>
> law, each case decided upon by the Imperial Council…the breaking of diplomatic
>
> ties by Redania is a hostile act; it would be difficult to expect the Council to vote
>
> in favour of the extradition of persons seeking asylum, were a hostile country to
>
> demand that extradition. It would be an unprecedented matter…Unless…A
>
> precedent were established. (*Baptism of Fire* 27)

With the introduction of legal precedence also comes the Positivist idea brought on by Shilard that governments must (first and foremost) adhere to written law before committing any actions. This is shown in the reasons Shilard gives for Nilfgaard's reluctance to extradite Enid an Gleanna/Francesca Findebair (an elvish enchantress who eventually becomes queen of her own kingdom of elves), who is wanted by the Northern kingdom because of her involvement in the events that took place on Thaenedd, in addition to her seizing power shortly after (i.e. establishing an elvish kingdom under her rule) (26). Shilard also establishes that (at least for Nilfgaard) any actions taken on behalf of the government that have not yet been bureaucratically established, must be established in such a way that follows the patterns previously set by government entities (i.e., precedence).

In addition to the extradition deal between Nilfgaard and Redania, the idea of an strictly Positivist view of legal philosophy in Nilfgaard is strengthened in the beginning of *The Tower of Swallows*, Vysogota tells Ciri about his life in Nilfgaard:

Imperial sentences do not lapse, even in a situation when the emperor who issued

it died long ago, and the present emperor has no cause to remember the previous

one fondly or share his views. The death sentence remains in force. That is the

law and custom in Nilfgaard. Sentences for high treason do not expire, and neither

are they subject to the amnesties that every emperor proclaims after his

coronation. (30)

The fact that the seemingly all-powerful emperor of Nilfgaard is even subject to obey the

previously established laws of the land show that in Nilfgaard, no matter how much power he

may be able to attain, bureaucratically established laws are what are held as true law. This is

particularly interesting, because not only does it serve as a legal check on the Nilfgaardian

emperor's power, but it also implies that there is precedence for such legal restrictions put on the

emperors of Nilfgaard. Such checks as these are often a form of assuring (at least somewhat)

government ethicality for the general citizenry. This is especially intriguing, as Sapkowski uses

instances like this to pose questions of government ethicality throughout his Witcher series.

A perfect example of Sapkowski's questioning of ethicality can be seen in Ciri's time

with Vysogota in *The Tower of Swallows*. After living with the hermit for a while, Ciri comes to

find out that he used to be "a doctor. A surgeon… an alchemist… a scholar, historian, a

philosopher and an ethicist" who has been exiled from both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Vysogota says to Ciri:

I was a professor at the Academy of Oxenfurt. I had to flee after publishing a

paper which was deemed godless. At that time, fifty years ago, it was punishable

by death. I had to emigrate… [a]nd I only ceased my flight when I reached the far

south, in the Nilfgaardian Empire. Later I finally became a lecturer in ethics at the

Imperial Academy in Castell Graupian… But I had to run from there, too, after

the publication of another treatise… Incidentally, the work dealt with totalitarian

power and the criminal character of imperialist wars, but officially I and my work

were accused of metaphysical mysticism and clerical schism. I was ruled I had

been goaded into action by the expansive and revisionist groups of priests who

were actually governing the kingdoms of the Nordlings… Indeed, it so happened

that the expansive priests in the North had long since been forgotten by their

people, but that had not been acknowledged in Nilfgaard. Combining mysticism

and superstition with politics was a severely punishable offence. (29)

This dialogue sets up a conversation between Vysogota and Ciri about the moral and ethical

codes of both the Northern Kingdoms and Southern Empire by establishing the strictly Naturalist

outlook on law and governance in the north (i.e., punishing Vysogota for writing a "godless"

paper), and the absolute Positivist view in the south (i.e., punishing Vysogota for writing a

overly superstitious treatise). After having brought the moral and ethical differences between the

north and south into the forefront of the dialogue, Sapkowski then immediately questions the

ethicality of both, through a continuation of this conversation between Ciri and Vysogota:

"What is ethics? I knew, but I've forgotten" [said Ciri].

"The study of morality. Of the precepts of conduct: of being decorous,

noble, decent and honest. Of the heights of goodness, to which probity and

morality carry up the human spirit. And of the chasms of evil, into which malice

and immorality are flung…"

"The Heights of goodness!" [Ciri] snorted. "Probity! Morality! Don't

make me laugh, or the scar on my face will burst. You were lucky that you

weren't hunted, that they didn't send bounty hunters after you, people like…

Bonhart. You'd see what chasms of evil are. Ethics? Your ethics are worth shit, O

Vysogota of Corvo. It isn't the evil and indecent who are flung down into the

depths, no!... The evil and decisive fling down those who are moral, honest and

noble but maladroit, hesitant and full of scruples!" (30)

This dialogue displays both a literal definition of ethics within the world of the Witcher through

Vysogota's defining of ethics, as well as calling that same definition of ethics into question

through Ciri's burst of outrage. By doing this, Sapkowski is inviting the reader to participate in

the ongoing political discussions he presents throughout the series. The significance of this

dialogue is that it poses a blatant philosophical question about the values of both the northern

kingdoms and southern empire.

Another aspect of the Witcher series that is particularly striking is Sapkowski's use of

real government systems and philosophies without the blatant use of historical governmental

allegory, like that which is found in politically charged Orwellian literature such as *Animal

Farm*, an allegory of Soviet Russia under communist rule. In other words, Sapkowski uses

different governmental styles such as authoritarianism and socialism in the countries within the

world of the Witcher, but does not obviously base these countries on any particular historical

government or regime. For example, shortly before reaching Toussaint, Geralt characterizes the

political ideas of a prefect in a Nilfgaardian province as "a world of bribery, blackmail and

entrapment, a world of turning imperial evidence and false witnesses. A world of snoopers and

coerced confessions. Informing and the fear of being informed upon" (*Tower of Swallows* 176).

This echoes Nazi Germany's grudge informing policies, which essentially stated that if one were

to inform on one's neighbor of any suspected anti-Nazi behavior, then that neighbor would be

put to death and one would not be suspect of such activities. Grudge informing caused mass paranoia throughout German neighborhoods under the control of the SS, as many innocent people were accused of anti-Nazi behavior, causing an "I need to inform on you before you inform on me" mentality.

However, though these philosophies are evidently found in the Nilfgaardian empire, Sapkowski does not write Nilfgaard as an allegorical equivalent to Nazi Germany. This is made evident earlier in the novel, when Nilfgaard seems to employ land grants reminiscent of U.S. Homestead Acts in order to persuade settlers to settle on the newly acquired northern borders of the Nilfgaardian empire. An example of these acts can be found after Bonhart (the mercenary who killed the Rats) has taken Ciri, when a real-estate tycoon is talking to a mercenary: "Do you know that anyone who moves [to the northern border of the empire] and chooses to settle on captured territory is guaranteed a plot of eight oxgangs by the empire? And freedom from tax for a decade?" (*Tower of Swallows* 141). This commentary on the Southern Empire's Homestead-esque policy further establishes the complex merging of philosophies from entirely different government systems which Sapkowski incorporates in the northern kingdoms and southern empire.

Essentially, Sapkowski is creating completely new government systems, founded upon the basis of a multitude of previously existing ones. In doing this, he allows the reader to consider certain political ideologies and philosophies objectively, i.e. outside of our previous associations of ideology. This phenomenon is seen right before Geralt and company enter into Nilfgaard in *Baptism of Fire,* when Zoltan Chivvay (a dwarf who has left his homeland, and an old friend of Geralt's) begins to talk about the current ruler of Mahakam (the dwarvish kingdom), Brouver Hoog, stating that the ruler views dwarves who have settled outside the

19

country's border as "apostates" (133). Later on, Zoltan goes into more detail, revealing a

government system (running through dwarvish rule) which feels particularly influenced by

Soviet philosophies:

> [Brouver Hoog] recently took it upon himself to regulate what he calls
>
> "community issues." For example: whether you can wear braces or not…
>
> Whether playing the ocarina is in keeping with our centuries-old dwarven
>
> traditions or is a destructive influence of rotten and decadent human culture. How
>
> many years you have to work before submitting an application for a permanent
>
> wife. (135)

The influence of Soviet philosophy lies in the emphasis on "community issues" that are regulated

by the government for the "good" of the whole. Furthermore, Zoltan describes Brouver Hoog as

an "old fart… [with a] beard and whiskers [that] are stuck together with dried borscht" (*Baptism

of Fire* 133). This is a particularly interesting description, as large beards and borscht are

historical staples of Russian culture and history. However, though Mahakam is characterized as

having similar governmental philosophies as soviet Russia, not once is it allegorized as soviet

Russia.

2.   MAGIC IN THE WITCHER

One of the most prominent aspects of Sapkowski's use of politics in the series is his interweaving of politics with magic. Sapkowski ties the realm of magic to law and legal philosophy throughout the series, as most narratively important enchanters and enchantresses are highly politically active individuals. Not only are the majority of them government advisors (or even head of a government system, as seen with Enid an Gleanna), but there is also an established magical community, with politics and moral/ethical questions of its own in regards to the good of magic and the rest of the world.

The last novel in Sapkowski's series, *The Lady of the Lake*, is particularly interesting because of its merging of science fiction and fantasy, which creates a modern lens through which to view moral and ethical questions that are brought up throughout the series. In merging fantasy magic with typically science fictional ideas and processes in this novel (i.e., magical experimentation and time travel), Sapkowski makes the fact that we as a human race are technologically evolving at an exponentially fast rate apparent. According to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction,* Arthur C. Clarke established three laws of science fiction, the last of which states that: "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Since Clarke originally established his last law of science fiction, the worlds of technology, science, and magic have been countlessly merged and reformed in literature. This very same concept of technology, science, and magic as one large conglomerate takes place throughout the Witcher series as well, as the majority of male magic users are often akin to scientists and academics within the series. Knowledge and research are often gleaned by, and from, enchanters, then put into the hands of female magic users who (though they have much the same knowledge and

capability of magical scientific research) tend to use this knowledge to further political ends. Throughout this, Sapkowski uses pseudo-scientific magic within the Witcher's world, questioning the ethicality and morality of our current politico-legal philosophies in a state of exponential advancement of technology.

Sapkowski decides to structure the usage and development of magic as two distinct areas of magical interest: that of academic pursuit of magic, and that of political management. For example, the first magic user we see in the series is an enchanter who proclaims himself as "Radcliffe of Oxenfurt" (a prestigious university within the world) (9). In contrast, the first enchantress we are introduced to is Yennefer, saving Dandelion (a bard and an old friend of both Geralt and Yennefer) from an interrogation from Rience (the main henchman of Vilgefortz) over the whereabouts of Ciri; this is the first of many political moves throughout the series (*Blood of Elves* 37-39).

Sapkowski not only gives enchantresses political power within his series, but also writes them as independent of male authority. This occurs partly because enchanters fulfil their masculine roles largely in magical academia that is mostly independent from the political sphere, in much the same way that enchantresses are mostly independent of the academic sphere. Enchantresses then are capable of functioning in the world without having to define themselves in terms of what is considered masculine or feminine. While this stark divergence of gender roles creates quite an interesting magical dichotomy within the series, neither Sapkowski, nor any of his characters, discuss these roles. This may be read as a subtle indicator of the lack of importance ascribed to gender roles in the series. Instead, the difference in gender roles establishes the presence of a majority of females within a variety of political fields, including government advisors, spies and/or informers, political ambassadors, and political peace keepers.

In other words, these women take responsibility for the governments they serve, as well as the general citizenry who rely upon them, almost as if they themselves are the monarchs of their respective governments. This can be seen in the major political positions and titles they hold, such as when Philipa is accompanied by Dijkstra to a magical conclave, and is then referred to as "Your excellency," a title reserved only for royalty (*Time of Contempt* 114).

On top of Philipa's near queen status due to her relationship with Dijkstra, Enid an Gleanna later becomes queen of her own kingdom of elves. Furthermore, these powerful roles are introduced to the reader shortly after Geralt and Ciri arrive at Kaer Morhen, when Triss Merigold (an enchantress friend of Yennefer, Ciri and Geralt) says (in reference to her own political role):

> [The witchers] defend orphans. While I fight that there should be as few of those
>
> orphans as possible. I'm fighting the cause, not the effect. That's why I'm on
>
> Foltest [the king of the kingdom Temeria] of Temeria's council and sit with
>
> Fercart and Keira Metz [an enchanter and enchantress advisor to Foltest
>
> respectively]. We deliberate on how to stop war from breaking out, and should it
>
> come to it, how to defend ourselves. (*Blood of Elves* 131)

These magic users are an integral part of the world's political mechanisms having been integrated into the realm of politics for the overall benefit of society, as made evident by Triss's position in King Foltest's council alongside yet another enchantress: Keira Metz.

Later in the series, however, the role enchantresses play within the machine of politics abruptly changes direction. In *Time of Contempt*, the revolutionary attack on the magical Conclave (essentially a body of magic users established in order to govern magic users as a whole) on Thaenedd (the epicenter of magical society within the Northern Kingdoms) leads to

the dismantling of the previous magical organizations. Not only does this insurrection lead to a massive political upheaval, but it also has a lasting effect on the rest of the events which transpire throughout the series. In turn, the Lodge is established and begins working its machinations throughout the magical community. Ironically, this creates a new realm of purely magical politics within the series, one that is not (unlike the previous establishment) inherently tied to that of governmental politics.

It is revealed towards the end of the series in *The Lady of the Lake* that the Lodge is not only running strong hundreds of years into the future, but has also played a role in tampering with history. This is revealed in a conversation in which the Lodge members discuss falsifying the record of actions that they have taken to destroy their enemy, Vilgefortz. In this instance, the Lodge is concerned about its reputation because as Nimue (an enchantress born centuries after the main events within the series take place) reveals, enchantresses (more specifically those of the Lodge) had been viewed in differing lights depending on the historical period: "there was a time when the reputations of sorceresses were maligned. As were the sorceresses themselves. And later there was the time of propaganda when the Great Sorceresses must have aroused respect, admiration and reverential fear by their very appearance" (*The Lady of the Lake* 39). The politically powerful roles women (specifically enchantresses) play in Sapkowski's series is extremely interesting, as the overall view of enchantresses seems to oscillate between positive and negative throughout the series.

Instances such as this with the Lodge, make clear that the women throughout the Witcher series are not bound by any set concept of good or bad, nor by any reliance on protection; they are shown to be quite capable of taking care of themselves in any given situation. In writing magical women within the Witcher series in such a way, Sapkowski is upholding an ever-

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growing tradition in fantasy literature of strong and diverse female characters. Melissa Thomas writes that after Tolkien, fantasy "began to reflect changing gender roles" (Teaching Fantasy 62). She points out, for instance, that David Eddings' "female characters crossed the boundaries of delicacy into the toughness of modern day women" and that "many recent authors seem to have tapped into a more truthful or at least more realistic characterization of women who are fallible, sometimes foolish, often funny, obstinate, brave, generous, and kind, and, in short, just as much along for the ride as anyone else" (Teaching Fantasy 62). Sapkowski does just that in the way he writes the many enchantresses throughout his narrative; not only are these women strong and independent, but they are people who are capable of making mistakes, of doing both harm and good.

The moral and ethical implications Sapkowski puts forth when mixing magic and politico-legal philosophy largely concerns the use of rhetoric, because both magic and politics work via language (more specifically: Elvish) in the Witcher series. It is no mistake that some of the book's largest political influences are also some of the most powerful wielders of magic within the world. Furthermore, the influence that magic has within the world is one that rivals all religious and governmental organizations in general. In presenting magic this way, Sapkowski not only makes clear that we may need to consider moral and ethical implications of near "magical" technological advancement, but also implies that rhetoric itself is a sort of magic that we must be wary of and able to control; after all, even the monarchs of the world, though most are unable to wield magic for themselves, tend to rely heavily on their magical advisors, who wield both political and magical rhetorical power. This is true for every monarch introduced in the series, except for Enid an Gleanna, who as a powerful enchantress is able to properly wield magic (and rhetoric) on her own.

Additionally, Sapkowski gives his magic users religious rhetorical power, as shown in a fictional writing called "The Life of St Philipa the Martyr of Mons Calvus" in *The Lady of the Lake* (455). This is a rather interesting dynamic to introduce to the cultural view of enchantresses in the series' world, as in doing this Sapkowski aligns them with religious figures such as saints. This is not the only time Sapkowski does this, however, as in *Baptism of Fire* Sapkowski writes of a religious priest's characterization of enchantresses in the world. This characterization occurs during Geralt's time with Zoltan Chivay, right before his arrival in Nilfgaard:

> For no one else but the sorceresses betrayed the kings on the Isle of Thaenedd and
>
> concocted the assassination of the King of Redania!... The vainglorious kings
>
> renounced the Gods, drove away the priests, took away their offices and seats on
>
> councils, and showered the loathsome sorceresses with honours and gold!
>
> (*Baptism of Fire* 161)

In doing this, Sapkowski not only ties magic to religion, but also implies that magic in and of itself serves as a replacement of religion in the series, especially in areas of special importance such as various government "offices and seats on councils" (161). Another example of this can be found in *The Lady of the Lake*:

> [A]long with the other Martyr Sisters, St Philipa was also calumniated for
>
> betraying the kingdom, for formenting tumults and sedition, for inciting the
>
> people and plotting an insurrection. Wilmerius, a heretic and cultist, and self-
>
> appointed high priest, ordered the Saint to be seized, thrown into a dark and foul
>
> prison beset with cold and stench, calling her to confess her sins and declare those
>
> that she had committed. (455)

This reveals a pseudo-religious rhetoric magic-users use throughout the political landscape by using terms such as "heretic," "priest," "saint," and "sins." Thus, not only are magic users (most often enchantresses) able to adapt to both secular and religious landscapes, but they also use the power of religious-esque rhetoric in order to achieve their own political ends.

Another particularly interesting fact to consider when analyzing the relationships between magic, rhetoric, and power in the Witcher series is that throughout Earth's history, rhetoric has been seen as shaping reality, just as enchanters and enchantresses do throughout the Witcher series by using their magic and political positions. Melba Vélez Ortiz writes about the ancient Egyptian understanding of rhetoric when she talks about the relationship between Ptah's (an ancient Egyptian deity thought to have been the creator of everything) creation of everything of the world, "Ma'at" which was an "ethico/spiritual principle… [which] functioned as the regulatory principle of morality," and rhetoric:

> Since *Ptah* spoke the world into existence, speech acts take on a decidedly divine nature in the context of ancient Egyptian culture(s). Words are considered to be capable of transforming reality and manifesting *Ma'at* unto our social interactions. For this reason, magic becomes part of the ancient Egyptian worldview and speech (language) is identified as the tool or vehicle through which magic can manifest into our lives.

This ancient understanding of rhetoric is extremely important to note, as it shows that putting rhetoric in relationship to power and magic is in no way a new concept. In other words, Sapkowski's granting of rhetorical power to magic users throughout his series is upholding an ancient tradition of thinking of rhetorical prowess as a reality altering power.

In doing this, Sapkowski is keeping a tradition within the fantasy genre to adopt aspects of ancient to medieval cultures into his fantasy world. This is seen throughout many fantasy series, most obviously Rick Riordan's adoption of ancient Greek (*Percy Jackson* series), Roman (*The Heroes of Olympus* series), Egyptian (*The Kane Chronicles*), and Norse myths (*Magnus Chase* series) into his fantasy world of myth, but maybe less obviously in fantasies by authors such as Robert Zalazny. Joseph V. Francavilla has found that throughout Zelazny's body of works, he "has economically conflated the myth and attributes of Prometheus with the mythic pattern and attributes of the sacrificed divine king and of the quest-hero" (208). Furthermore, Francavilla establishes that "[t]he structures of the central dramatic situations and of the chief conflicts in Zelazny's stories are also directly related to the Prometheus myth" (208). Francavilla's revealing of Zelazny's uses of the myth of Prometheus is an example of how fantasy and science fiction both use ancient concepts in the structuring and development of characters and narratives. In much the same way as Zelazny bases his heroes on Prometheus, Sapkowski bases the rhetorical and magical power his enchantresses wield on ancient understandings of rhetoric.

3.   THE REAL-WORLD EFFECTS OF FANTASY

While the innerworkings of fantasy politics (both magical and non-magical) most obviously have an effect within the world of the Witcher, the significance of Sapkowski's series partly lies within the effect it could have on real-world politics. Paul Kirby goes into great detail about the effects of science-fiction and fantasy (using "speculative fiction" as a blanket term for the usage of both genres) on politics and pop-culture, and vice versa. Kirby essentially argues that pop-culture, politics, and speculative fiction have direct, omni-directional impacts on the constantly evolving structure among them. In other words, pop-culture has an impact on both speculative fiction and politics, speculative fiction has an impact on both politics and pop-culture, and politics has an impact on both pop-culture and speculative fiction (Kirby). Kirby goes on to summarize an article in *The New York Times* by Seth Mydans:

> [A] military coup took place in Thailand. In addition to dissolving democratic
> institutions, the new junta greatly restricted freedom of assembly and expression.
> In response, protestors adopted the distinctive three-finger salute from the popular
> science fiction film (and previously book) series The Hunger Games at their
> rallies. The gesture was outlawed and students arrested for raising it, leading some
> theaters to cancel showings of The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1. (Kirby
> 581)

Incidents such as these are important to note because they provide concrete evidence that fantasy literature has the ability to affect politics and pop-culture.

Conversely, William Gray discusses Philip Pullman's objectives in writing the *His Dark Materials* series. According to Gray Pullman's trilogy addresses "central religious questions that

have major cultural implications" (Gray 1). Furthermore, Pullman's series "not only… present[s] a highly negative image of institutional religion, specifically of the Church; it also engages in a quasi-theological argument about the nature of the Christian story, or metanarrative, of the Fall" (Gray 1). In the theological questions and implications the *His Dark Materials* trilogy possesses, fantasy shows that it can be (and often is) written for a political purpose. In this regard, Pullman makes a surprising statement about fantasy:

> I don't like fantasy. The only thing about fantasy that interested me when I was writing this was the freedom to invent imagery such as the daemon; but that was only interesting because I could use it to say something truthful and realistic about human nature. If it was just picturesque or ornamental, I wouldn't be interested.
>
> (qtd. in Gray 152)

Pullman is clearly using fantasy elements in order to communicate an idea of the nature of humanity to his readers; fantasy is not only able to be adapted by pop-culture to use as a tool, but can also be created as a tool in order to effect pop-culture. Furthermore, speaking of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (predating Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by 34 years), Pullman goes on to claim that: "[It is] a very poorly written, clumsily constructed book which nevertheless has the force, the power, the intensity of genius. [He] uses fantasy to say something profound about morality – none of Tolkien's imitators do this" (qtd. in Gray 153). Pullman shows that fantasy is not only currently being used as a tool, but has also been historically used as well.

While both the use of *The Hunger Games* movies in Thailand and Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy use fantasy in different ways (*The Hunger Games* inciting certain ideologies, while *His Dark Materials* communicates theological ideas), both show that fantasy is not only

affected by real world politics and pop-culture, but also has the ability to affect the real world

through the communication of political ideas. The way these two pieces of speculative fiction

truly differentiate however, is in how and why they were written. Whereas the political ideas

from *The Hunger Games* were enacted by a real world society (i.e. the Thailand incident), the

His Dark Materials trilogy is an example of a fantasy purposefully making a political statement

in order to impact a culture/society.

Furthermore, fantasy can be used to effect pop-culture and politics in a multitude of

ways. Jules Zanger discusses the different ways fantasy can affect the forming and spreading of

ideologies:

> We immediately think of that whole class of utopian or satiric fantasy, from
>
> Aristophanes' *The Birds*, to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, to Orwell's *Animal Farm*-
>
> that invites the reader to read with a kind of double vision, recording the details of
>
> the fantasy world and decoding them into their recognizable real world [sic]
>
> equivalent. Other forms of fantasy have no such programmatic, conscious,
>
> organizing principle. Instead, they rely more heavily on literary models, or
>
> variations, which appear to have little systematic relationship to reality.
>
> Nevertheless, even in those fantasies least clearly linked to the familiar world of
>
> experience or to existing models, the careful reader can discover in the value
>
> structure, in the characterizations, even in the imagery and metaphor, evidence of
>
> the social situation that the fantasy retains and transforms. (228-229)

What Zanger is conveying is that fantasy has the ability to not only use allegory to convey

political ideologies (like works akin to Orwell's), but can also promote ideologies without the

use of allegory altogether. Additionally, research undertaken by Anthony Gierzynski and

Kathryn Eddy yielded significant amounts of data that display the effects of the Harry Potter series on Millennials. Their research provides evidence of consistently similar political views in Harry Potter fans concerning voting habits in the 2008 presidential election, as well as several political concerns of the time. Gierzynski and Eddy attribute the political effect Rowling's series had on Millennials to the immersion fantasy often provides its readers:

> When we become immersed in a story, we are moved to emulate the characteristics of the heroes and reject those of the villains. When we become immersed, we truly experience all that the fictional world offers and take to heart the lessons that our heroes learn. In doing so, we internalize those characteristics and lessons in ways that can shape our politics. (78)

In other words, Gierzynski and Eddy explain that because of the heroic nature of fantasy protagonists, readers try to use the lessons learned by the protagonists in their personal lives. In turn, these lessons have the capability to form political opinions and decisions. Furthermore, Gierzynski and Eddy's research establishes that fantasy authors such as J. K. Rowling may not even have the intent to "teach or influence [their] readers in any way," but because "all stories invariably reflect the author's perspectives… [stories are] filled with values, perspectives, and characters that [have] the potential to shape the values and perspectives of those who read or listen to it" (5). Essentially, this means that fantasy authors may not intend to make the political statements that society gleans from their work. What Gierzynski and Eddy establish about the inherent political effects that fantasy literature has on its readers, and what Zanger establishes about the different ways that fantasy literature can affect its readers, implies that Sapkowski's series could conceivably have an effect on its readers (whether it be Sapkowski's intent or not).

The Witcher series is popular enough in Western Culture alone, having already been

adapted to video games, shows, and various other cultural artifacts since its first conception in

the 90's, to have the capability to effect political opinions and decisions in its readers, much as

the Harry Potter series did at the turn of the 21st century. As the Harry Potter series did, the

Witcher series establishes several conversations throughout the narrative about political ethics

and morality. For example, in the final novel of the series, *The Lady of the Lake*, Sapkowski uses

a framing device, in which he writes from the perspective of students living in what is to be

understood as the modern era; he then creates dialogues among the students learning about the

events that have transpired throughout the series, which (at this point) is several hundred years in

the past. When this time jump into the modern age happens, more often than not, there is a

blatant lesson Sapkowski is communicating to the reader. A prime example of this can be seen in

the dialogue within a literal lesson that Sapkowski writes among Nimue, another student named

Abonde, and their teacher:

> 'Why the hell do we have to learn about this ancient history?' muttered Abonde,
>
> sitting down. 'Who's bothered about it today? And what use is it?'
>
> 'Silence! Novice Nimue.'
>
> 'So, the chronicles teach us that the convent of master sorceresses
>
> gathered at Bald Mountain Castle to decide on how to end the damaging war that
>
> the emperor of the South was waging with the kings of the North. Esteemed
>
> Mother Assire, the holy martyr, said that the rulers would not stop fighting until
>
> they had lost a lot of men. And Esteemed Mother Philipa, the holy martyr,
>
> answered: "Let us then give them a great a bloody, awful and cruel battle. Let us
>
> bring about such a battle. Let the emperor's armies and the kings' forces run in
>
> blood in that battle, and then we, the Great Lodge, shall force them to make

peace". And this is precisely what happened… the rulers were forced to sign the

Peace of Cintra.' (*The Lady of the Lake* 300-301)

Sapkowski uses this conversation in order to convey the importance of knowing political history. In addition to his point about the importance of learning political history, Sapkowski uses this modern-day conversation between the two students and teacher to invite the reader to critically think about the political situations and questions he presents throughout the series. For instance, the incident on Thaenedd, the political differences between government states such as the northern kingdoms and Nilfgaard, and the Lodge's tampering with political events all present political situations for the reader to critically think about. Taking this into account, this novel is presenting political questions and ideas that can be easily adopted by any given society (such as the case with *The Hunger Games* incident), as well as presenting it using an objective lens (the fantasy genre and relatively modern framing devices) and inviting the reader to participate in the conversation (as with *His Dark Materials*).

This same tactic has been used with pieces of fiction for millennia. A perfect example of this can be seen in ancient Greece, in Gorgias's use of the *Encomium of Helen*, of which Nathan Crick writes: "[a]lthough not itself a theoretical treatise… but rather a fictional pedagogical tool to reveal to students the nature of *logos* and to provide a test suitable for imitation in actual practice" (80). This pedagogical tactic of the ancient Greeks is extremely important to note, as Sapkowski uses this same tactic in using a fictional setting in order to establish a discussion to his readers throughout the series.

The in-depth descriptions of both northern and southern government machinations serve a purpose to include the reader in the political conversation that Sapkowski is trying to establish in his series. Additionally, Sapkowski is also affecting the reader's thought processes in regards

to the philosophies he uses. In turn, the more engrained within pop-culture (i.e. the series becoming a social norm, with its various plot points becoming common knowledge) the Witcher series becomes, the more effect the political philosophical discussions may have.

Interestingly enough, a similar phenomenon has happened in another fantasy series (albeit with a lot more focus on politics than fantasy): *Game of Thrones*. Matteo Barbagello talks about George R. R. Martin's use of philosophies that he adopted from Sun Tzu, Niccolo Machiavelli, and John Nash. Barbagello not only establishes the influences these men have had on Martin's series, but also breaks down how and where Martin puts these philosophies in his series. Furthermore, in a brief essay within the same collection as Barbagello's, Lindsey Mantoan even goes so far as to wonder what the social response would have been had a particularly degrading episode of *Game of Thrones* aired after the #metoo movement, and that it would be "worth considering to what extent *Game of Thrones*—along with so many other triggers—helped bring on #metoo" (92). Even the fact that modern scholarship is questioning the effects which popular fantasy like *Game of Thrones* has had on social movements such as the #metoo movement goes to show the potential effect fantasy can have on pop-culture and politics.

Fantasy's effect on movements is in no way a new idea. A perfect example of this can be seen in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Susan Ang points out that in the 1960's Tolkien's fantasy caught the attention of hippies, stating that:

> [In] the 'hippie' era… people began to become acutely aware of man's impact on the environment and, to many, Tolkien appeared to be extolling a back-to-nature attitude. In the United States, there were other issues that had begun to reach boiling point and, to some, Tolkien's writing seemed to act as a focal point for

these reactions. This was the time of the Vietnam War…and some people read

The Lord of the Rings as an anti-war book. (103-104)

The influence of the *Lord of the Rings* series on central political and social issues outlined by

Ang establishes that cornerstone fantasies can have a lasting effect on real-world movements.

Tolkien's work served to be a focal point for socio-political reactions in regards to important

political issues, such as the Vietnam war (1955-1975) and hippie environmentalism, for years. In

other words, the series gained much popularity due to the fact that many people read Tolkien's

books as supporting their political attitude. To reiterate the massive cultural interest in Tolkien's

series, Ang even goes into the continually rising popularity of Tolkien's books, observing that

The Lord of the Rings book sales increased 600% after the first Peter Jackson film was released

(109). It is crucial to recognize the immense, rising, popularity of the *Lord of the Rings* series in

order to grasp the potential pop-cultural and political effects any given fantasy series, such as the

Witcher, may have on western culture.

CONCLUSION

When first looked at, the Witcher series may seem like any other pop-culture fantasy craze. However, not only does the series contain a significant number of political, legal, and philosophical conversations, but also directly invites the reader to participate within those conversations through the questions posed throughout the series. Sapkowski does this by putting his characters through a fairly large variety of political situations, and creating entire governments which function off of different politico-legal philosophies. Furthermore, the ethicality and morality of the two primary legal philosophies presented to the reader (Naturalism and Positivism) are questioned time and again throughout the series, actively calling the reader to question their validity.

Sapkowski not only centers his governments around the Naturalist and Positivist philosophies, but also centers magic around politics as well. He establishes several democratic societies of magic users (the Conclave and the Lodge), as well as establishes the stark lack thereof in areas where Naturalism is all but completely absent (Nilfgaard); in other words, where magic is abundant, Naturalism is sure to run in abundance as well. Furthermore, Sapkowski also presents his magic users as having a particular talent with rhetoric, thus combining the world altering powers of magic and rhetoric. This is evident not only in the political importance magic possesses within the world (as shown by the cataclysmic events on Thaenedd), but also in that every northern kingdom has at least one magical advisor who is second only to the whoever is ruling the kingdom.

Finally, scholarship has shown that fantasy has had real effects on our world. This becomes apparent when looking at pop-culture's tendency to adopt the ideologies and political

strategies of fantasy worlds such as *Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter* series. In addition to the literal appropriation of political techniques from the *Hunger Games*, and the data-backed evidence of the political effects *Harry Potter* has had on millennials, fantasy even has had long-term effects on entire political and social movements, as shown by the cornerstone fantasy series in western pop-culture: *Lord of the Rings*.

Modern scholarship in popular modern fantasy series such as *Hunger Games*, *Harry Potter*, and *Game of Thrones* shows just how prominent fantasy is in modern western pop-culture, even in regards to politics. The syllabus to a class titled Video Games and World Politics: From Entertainment to Social Critique, taught at Central European University, shows that there is a serious academic interest not only in studying fantasy, but its effects on politics as well. Their class even has a section concerning the making of political decisions, in which the Witcher game (based on Sapkowski's series) is one of the primary games they analyzed. With the rising combination of academic and pop-cultural interest in the Witcher series and its adaptations into various narrative mediums, one cannot help but wonder just how influential this relatively new fantasy will be on western pop-culture.

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