

THE WITCHER | MAIN TRAILER | NETFLIX by The Witcher Netflix

Vision: The Witcher

Yael Cameron / Apr 21, 2023

Release date: 20 December 2019, Created by: Lauren Schmidt
Hissrich. Available on Netflix

Andrzej Sapkowski first wrote about the resolute and lonely antihero, Geralt of Rivia, protagonist of *The Witcher*, in 1986, as a short story for a Polish speculative fiction and fantasy magazine, *Fantastyka*. The *Witcher* short stories, comics, and novels gathered such a following in Poland thereafter that Sapkowski became known as the Polish Tolkien.^[1] Since the early days of publication and film adaptations in Poland, *The Witcher* has had a remarkable reception globally. The *Witcher* and its lore came to prominence more widely when CD Projekt Red picked up the storyline for an action role playing PC game in 2007. The game series reached an apogee with its third edition released in 2015, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*.^[2] It was an ambitious, controversial, and critically acclaimed game, with its world built to

a remarkable scale. It is said to be one of the most successful games on the market with over 28.3 million copies sold. At the end of 2019, Netflix released the first series of *The Witcher* in English, a TV series created by Lauren Schmidt Hissrich.^[3] With Superman's Henry Cavill assuming the lead role as Geralt of Rivia, this adaptation has achieved considerable attention. The first season of this series had a perplexing start but the second season directed by Hissrich, Stephen Surjik, and others has been received well by critics who lauded the strong storytelling and satisfying exploration of complex themes.^[4] The third season is due to air some time in summer of 2023.

Critics seem undecided as to whether the original author of *The Witcher*, Andrzej Sapkowski, himself is religious or not. Reports range from atheist to profoundly faithful. Harley J. Sims claims Sapkowski openly identified as a practicing Catholic in an interview in relation to the premiere of the Polish film adaptation of the books.^[5] Regardless of Sapkowski's actual stance, critics agree that pagan roots of Slavic fairy tales, the legacy of the medieval church, and the enduring presence of Catholicism in Poland today have seeped into the *Witcher's* story in various ways, not least the portions of dialogue that are demonstrably theological.^[6] Religions and spiritualities abound in *The Witcher*, from the Sun cult of Nilfgaard to the magical beliefs and rituals of sorceresses, the brutal practices of the Church of the Eternal fire, various maternal cults, belief systems, gods, as well as notions of afterlife, and the presence of things sacred and evil.

Schmidt-Hissrich's English adaptation of *The Witcher* follows Sapkowski's short stories more or less. The serious fans of the original stories and the game are quite bitterly divided on how well the adaptation aligns. The first season begins ambitiously, exploring and developing the triad of main characters, Geralt of Rivia, Ciri of Cintra, and Yennefer of Vengerberg, through anachronistic story arcs. The logic behind this out-of-sequence braiding of the plot is to introduce the viewer to both the unique life situation and experience of the characters (birth, class, powers) and their political significance and allegiance in a world of rising and falling kingdoms. Their lives will eventually intersect on The Continent, an intricate geopolitical world that consists of a number of feudal states and kingdoms in the north, with a common enemy in a hostile and expanding southern empire, Nilfgaard. Furthermore, Sapkowski adds to the already fragile mix marginalised indigenous Elven and Dwarven tribes and powerful arcane

schools of magic, all with their own spiritualities and religions.

Henry Cavill describes the protagonist, Geralt of Rivia, as the "most fascinating and nuanced of men."^[7] Through a less valorising lens it could also be said that Geralt is a conflicted mercenary with no political allegiance except to coin he is paid to slay the monsters that terrorise villages in the north.^[8] In the early years of human colonization of the north, the feudal rulers tasked magicians to create magically-enhanced warriors called "Witchers" to protect their holdings.^[9] As a child, Geralt of Rivia, is left by his sorceress mother to be raised at the brutal Witcher school of Kaer Morhen. He is one of the few boy children that survive the exposure to alchemical substances that were to enhance their magical potency and extend their physical capacity for close combat. The trial turned his hair white and profoundly affected him in other ways. His grim posture is a product of an early childhood experience of maternal abandonment, and the cruelty of the trials of his youth, further cemented by fear, suspicion, and ostracization by the world in his adulthood. The Witcher, as realised by Hissrich, is a tragic antihero, yet his flaws are salvaged somehow by his internal struggle for humanity and his stoic concern with the ethics of good and evil.

It could be said in terms of biblical typology that The Witcher resembles a kind of Kierkegaardian Elijah. Geralt of Rivia occupies the typical qualities of a lonely and existentially troubled prophet-warrior. He sleeps rough in the wilderness, often cold and hungry, and is alienated from common folk by his miraculous powers and his own self-reproach. His only companion is his horse Roach who receives the bulk of Geralt's soul-searching. The Witcher's life is nomadic, moving from village to village in search of redemption, and deferring his personal suffering through endless Sisyphean combat with monsters. His only human contact is with the various extraordinary women he occasionally encounters, such as Yennefer of Vengerberg. At the same time, as his trade as a mercenary is sought after, he is conversely drawn reluctantly into the politics and skirmishes of the northern kingdoms and townships, and the gerrymandering of wizards and sorceresses.

His story is driven forward by destiny and salvation comes through his reluctant fostering of a child through the Law of Surprise, an oath reminiscent of Jephthah's in Judges 11. However, rather than becoming her father's sacrifice, Ciri becomes a kind of disciple to Geralt, learning martial arts and entering into her own destiny rather than Geralt's. The story of Elijah, in 1

Kings 17 and 18 resonates with the Witcher's plight. Recall Elijah's fraught and lonely exile in the wadi (1 Kgs 17:3), his sojourns with the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:9) and his battles against the monstrous god in the north, Baal, and Baal's 450 adepts (1 Kgs 18:20-40). Elijah's story is one of divine quests and Elijah too fosters a young man, Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19). Like Geralt, Elijah is a tragic hero whose hands are bathed in the blood of destiny, so much so that he wishes for death on account of his own violence (1 Kgs 19:3).

The Witcher PC games and Netflix series are not without controversy. Critics point out pervasive representations of sex and violence. The sexual objectification of women and valorisation of toxic masculinity is ubiquitous according to Oren Ashkenazi who sees The Witcher series' attempt to be sensitive to current social discourse around sexuality and consent is limited to say the least.^[10] However, for commentators like Simon Parkin, they suggest that representations particularly of Geralt's sexual relationships are meaningful rather than gratuitous. A human world without sex is either a world viewed through a child's eyes, or an entirely dishonest one.^[11] Furthermore, the character of Geralt of Rivia could be said to represent significant subversion of toxic representations of masculinity towards the possibility of masculine nurturing and care.^[12] This holds true for the characterization of Geralt as morally conflicted antihero yet who through his commitment to the safety and care of his ward, Ciri, finds new purpose and humanity in his life.

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[1] Harley J. Sims, "A Polish Tolkien? The Fantasy World of Andrzej Sapkowski," *MercatorNet* (13 Dec, 2016) <https://mercatornet.com/a-polish-tolkien-the-fantasy-world-of-andrzej-sapkowski/10619/>.

[2] CD Projekt Red. *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, PS5, 2015.

[3] *The Witcher*, season 1, Created by Lauren Schmidt Hissrich, released 20 Dec, 2019. <https://www.netflix.com/nz/title/80189685>.

[4] Benonie Butler, "The Witcher Ended its Second Season With a Big Twist and a Subtle Clue that it was Coming," *The Washington Post* (22 Dec, 2021): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/12/22/the-witcher-finale-twist/>.

[5] Sims, "A Polish Tolkien?"

[6] Andrzej Sapkowski, "The Last Wish" (trans. Danusia Stok) in *The Complete Witcher* (London: Gollancz), 48

[7] Chancellor Agard, "Liam Hemsworth Is Picking Up Geralt's Sword for The Witcher Season 4," *Netflix Tudum*, (30 October, 2022), (<https://www.netflix.com/tudum/articles/the-witcher-season-4-liam-hemsworth>).

[8] "The Witcher Star Henry Cavill On Why He HAD to Play Monster Hunter Geralt," *Rotten Tomatoes*, (21 December, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13qHfXhY47Q>.

[9] "Witcher," *Fandom* (5 November, 2022), <https://witcher.fandom.com/wiki/Witcher>.

[10] Oren Ashkenazi, "Eight Sexist Themes From The Witcher TV Show," *Mythcreants* (25 January 2022), <https://mythcreants.com/blog/eight-sexist-themes-from-the-witcher-tv-show/>; Riley McLeod, "Netflix's Witcher Show Is More About Politics Than Monster Hunting," *Kotaku* (Dec 20, 2019). <https://kotaku.com/netflixs-witcher-show-is-more-about-politics-than-monst-1840546135>.

[11] Simon Parkin, "Why Sex Matters in Witcher 3, the Grand Theft Auto of fantasy games," *The Guardian*, (28 January 2015),

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/28/sex-witcher-3-grand-theft-auto-of-fantasy-games>

[12] Lisa Cuklanz and Ali Erol, "The Shifting Image of Hegemonic Masculinity," *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), 545-62.

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Poetry: Mercy of Christ

Miriam Jessie Fisher / Apr 21, 2023

sometimes I discover
I am
disconnected
out of sorts
perplexed
sitting at the intersect of an unsaid prayer
the breath before the sentence

I am
paralysed by the pressure to perform
to prove

to make an eloquent argument
and be genuine and confidence inducing

I find myself crushed by the suspicious gaze
that asks if I am
your kind of Christian

I want to make you feel safe
I want to impress you
perform in your approved parade
and receive your applause as a reward

except

except it is for you and not for Christ
you become the crowd and the crown
dispenser of stickers and cookies
and pats on the back

I cannot perform for you
I will miss-step and you will disapprove
I cannot be the pharisee you'd like me to be
balancing multiple burdens while expertly tithing mint and thyme

I am made to drop my burdens, messy, in my hurry to touch the edge of his garment
to meet him by a well, when I am thirsty, and he is living water

I am longing to touch the ordinary, extraordinary, scarred hands of Jesus

I am made
to hear him say
the one you are looking for is me

and in that short sentence

I am willing
to throw my lot in with the sinners who surround him ð rich and poor alike
those friends who stink of fish ð who walk, and sink, on water

the breath before the word expands

I have cast
will cast
am casting myself
upon the mercy of Christ

I cannot be more than a daughter
who has been welcomed home

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The Voice: The One Thing in Two Stories

Geoff New / Apr 21, 2023

Luke 10

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things; 42 but few things are needed—nor indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (NIV)^[1]

Luke 15

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has

squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!³¹ "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

Over time, any preaching ministry will discover two certainties.

One, if you preach about Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), you will discover the very people you preached to will *still* harbour sympathy (if not, empathy) with Martha. She had a point will be the invariable defence from members of the congregation.

Two, if you preach on the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), you will discover the very people you preached to will *still* harbour sympathy (if not, empathy) with the elder brother. He had a point will be invariable defence from members of the congregation.

Perhaps the reason for the similar response to these stories is the sheer humanity evident in both. Both the elder brother and the elder sister^[2] attend to their duties. As we hear their story, it evokes within us, at best, a sense of responsibility to attend to our duties, and at worst, resentment towards others if they don't follow our example. Both stories indicate the issue is not so much what these two siblings have put their hand to as much as what they have allowed their heart to become: estranged. In becoming estranged from their siblings they have by implication become estranged from their God.

Any virtue of their service in the field or the home has been hollowed out by simmering resentment towards the sibling in question. In response to the elder sister, the Lord appeals to her to see her younger sister anew (i.e. Luke 10:42 "she has chosen what is better"). In response to the elder brother, the father appeals to him to see his younger brother anew (i.e. Luke 15:32 "he was dead and is alive again; was lost and is found"). In both stories, the path of approval to the authority figure is through renewed relationship with the person who is mistakenly seen as an obstacle in it all. In both stories, the apparent problematic sibling proves to be the sibling with the solution. And if you are the one with the simmering resentment, that revelation can feel like death! How galling! How humbling! The very person you complain about to God turns out to be the one he uses as a role model. A classic

kingdom of God lesson and one which never gets any easier to digest.

This kingdom lesson is further emphasised in a subtle yet significant way. The elder sister in Luke 10 is a character in an actual event. The elder brother in Luke 15 is a character in a parable. When we place both narratives side-by-side it is as if they are intertwined. If both stories were told as stand-alone stories, I doubt we would be able to identify which was the parable and which was the historical event. Further, both stories provide a shocking new vision that was counter-cultural in that day; a younger offensive brother welcomed home as a son; a younger offensive sister welcomed as a disciple. Both stories are orientated to the nature of the kingdom of God. Both stories remain unfinished. We are not told whether the elder brother or the elder sister walk into the new space they are invited into. Only you know what ending you will give both stories by your response. Both stories remain counter-cultural and both stories still orientate us to the kingdom.

That both stories could either be true or a parable is due to Jesus. Whether he tells the story or is involved in the story makes no difference. He is requiring a response and he is not impressed when religious duty trumps spiritual devotion in whatever form. Whether that is spiritual devotion in the form of joining in the celebration of a repentant sinner or joining in the practice of a responsive sister.

The overarching presence of Jesus in both stories is as Lord. Luke uses "Lord" three times in Luke 10. Perhaps it is no accident that Martha's name carries the feminine meaning of "lord, master"^[3] and so there is the dynamic of who is in charge; Martha as Lord of her home or Jesus as Lord at her home? The presence of two lords captures the tension in Martha's home and heart. We see the same kind of battle in Luke 15. The elder brother assumes the role of a lord of the household in attempting to correct *the* lord of the household, his father.

The father will not side with his son's bitterness and coldness. The father offers his son one thing: come and dance. To no doubt, dance with the very person who causes him such deep offence.

Jesus will not side with his daughter's distraction and worry. The Lord offers his daughter one thing: come and sit.

And here is the thing.

We often read the Mary and Martha story that the one thing is for Martha to sit and listen to Jesus. Yes ¹ that is true. But not true enough.

She is being invited to sit and listen to Jesus *with* the very person she is angry with.

The counsel of Jesus to Martha, "You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—nor indeed only one" (Luke 10:41–42), has not lost its relevance or revelation.

You cannot join in with the work and presence of God without joining with the people of God.

"Mary has chosen what is better . . ." (Luke 10:42) says Jesus.

"This brother of yours . . ." (Luke 15:32) says the father.

Choose the one and better thing.

It involves sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him.

It involves moving your feet in dance and celebrating his redemption.

It involves being with the very people who drove you to complain to God.

It involves being corrected by God through the agency of the very people you thought were wrong.

Geoff New

^[1] All bible references from NIV.

^[2] While the biblical text does not explicitly state the birth order of the two sisters, it is a reasonable assumption that Martha is probably the older sister given she is the hostess, and

the home is hers. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51 Ð 24:53 Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994/2006), 1040.

^[3] Bock, *Luke*, 1040.

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