Chapter 5

Blurred Borders Between Good and Evil in Today's "Lesser Evil World":
The Witcher as Book, Game, and Netflix Series

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ABSTRACT

The series of The Witcher discussed in this study stems from book series written by Andrzej Sapkowski. It started as a set of short stories in the 1980s. As short stories became very popular, full-length books were published in 1993. The most heard of The Witcher series was the digital game adaptations that was released since 2007 and lastly as TV series on Netflix in 2019. The story of The Witcher series is about a witcher named Geralt of Rivia. Geralt on the journey of evil hunting is narrated to the audience in a fantastic way. Although Geralt is an anti-hero fighting evil in the series, he himself stands on a very fine line between good and evil. This situation is noticeable not only in the main character of the series, but also in other prominent characters and reflects "the lesser evil" phenomenon throughout the series. From this point of view, The Witcher series, which conveys how the boundary between good and evil, can be transitive and relative and has been discussed through the concept of lesser evil.

INTRODUCTION

"Evil is evil. Lesser, greater, middling, makes no difference. The degree's arbitrary, the definition's blurred. If I'm to choose between one evil and another, I'd rather not choose at".

Geralt of Rivia

Since the existence of humankind in the world, people have always faced situations where they has to choose between good and bad. In a virtually morally perfect world, no one would have encountered much of such difficult choices. If everyone were completely conscientious and good, most of the difficult and tragic choices would not have arisen. Even if all the people in the world were bad, hard choices in this style would not enmeshed people in dilemmas. In particular, to prevent someone else from doing anything worse, the individual would never have to decide whether they should choose the lesser evil behaviour. Unfortunately, we do not live in such a perfect world. There are good and bad, and a person's choice of the good or bad option leads her/him to be qualified as the same, that is, good or bad (Hill Jr., 1983, p. 213). With greed, evil, jealousy, pride or some other emotions, people are ready to commit the most disgusting crimes against other people. Goodness and evil come across to the individual everywhere, spreading all areas of life.

The media industry also loves and supports products containing classical narratives, because the classical narrative, which set off from the struggle between good and evil, has always been the lifeline of the media industry. People like to see that good people get what they deserve, while bad people are punished in news, movies or books. However, especially in recent years, the boundaries between good and evil have blurred in movies and TV series, and bad characters has been brought more to the fore with different aspects.

For instance, although characters such as Joker in *Batman* and Loki in the movie of *Thor* play the villain, they are loved at least as much as the hero of the movie, and perhaps even more. While the Walter White character in *Breaking Bad*, which is a very popular tv series liked by everone, is a "very good man" at the beginning of the series, becomes a person who can be described as "bad" later in the series. On the other hand, it is noteworthy how a character with "bad" qualities like Jesse Pinkman differs in the later parts of the series. Therefore, the distinction between good and evil is not as sharp as before, perhaps because the postmodern narrative is also more exposed to media products. From now on someone who is known as good can do bad things; what is known as bad can win the hearts of the audience due to their justified reasons.

Sometimes, the individual can find himself/herself in a situation where s/he has to choose from more than one bad option at the same time. The fact that the individual who is known as good has to choose lesser evil in order not to choose the worst brings with many moral debates. From this point of view, this study will try to explain how the boundary between good and evil is blurred with examples from the *The Witcher* series, which has already taken the concept of "lesser evil" to the center of its story. Starting from the books, there are many events in *The Witcher* series that are based on a combination of good and evil, and that someone who is thought to be good can do unexpectedly bad things. On the other hand, whether *The Witcher*, which is popular with the book, then the game, and finally with the Netflix series, differs in the presentation of the good and evil, lesser evil in different channels, and if there is a difference, the reasons will be discussed.

THE CONCEPT OF LESSER EVIL

The concept of lesser evil, which is a component of Christian thought (Lang 2007, pp. 18–41), is also found in the work of Epicurus and Aristo (Molloy, 2009, p. 100). However Spielthenner (2010, p. 140)

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