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An Analysis of Celtic and Welsh Mythology in *The  
Raven Boys Saga* by Maggie Stiefvater

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The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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## ABSTRACT

The presence of myth and folklore in Young Adult fantasy has increased in the last decades, boosting the genre's popularity among young readers. The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the way in which, specifically Welsh/Celtic mythology and folklore, are included in fictional worlds of fantasy as exemplified in Maggie Stiefvater's four-book saga *The Raven Cycle*. Although the narrative is framed in a modern-day American setting, several allusions to Welsh/Celtic mythology, folklore, and historical figures can be found throughout the story, also in relation with more worldwide-spread beliefs as well as myths.

Keywords: Welsh, Celtic, mythology, folklore, Young Adult fiction, fantasy, Maggie Stiefvater, *The Raven Cycle*.

## RESUMEN

La presencia de mitos y folclore en la ficción juvenil ha ido incrementando a lo largo de las últimas décadas, haciendo que dicho género gane popularidad entre sus lectores. El objetivo de este Trabajo de Fin de Máster es analizar la inclusión de, en particular, la mitología y folclore celta/gaélico en mundos fantásticos, más concretamente en el creado por Maggie Stiefvater en la saga *The Raven Cycle*, compuesta por cuatro libros. Aunque la narrativa de esta saga se enmarca en la Norteamérica actual, se pueden apreciar en ella diferentes alusiones a la mitología y folclore gaélicos/celtas, así como la inclusión de algunos de sus personajes históricos, estableciendo también una relación entre esta cultura y creencias o mitos con carácter más globalizado.

Palabras clave: gaélico, celta, mitología, folclore, ficción juvenil, fantasía, Maggie Stiefvater, *The Raven Cycle*.



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, fantasy in Young Adult fiction has been gaining popularity among its readership while the genre's writers achieved wider recognition and received important distinctions such as the Michael L. Printz Awards or the Hugo Awards. One of the reasons for this boost in popularity may be the use of the entertaining medium of fantasy in order to convey teachings and values to younger readers. YA fiction thus becomes a powerful aid in the latter's process of achieving maturity: a vehicle for the transmission and learning of new valuable lessons while being immersed in another world, a magical one with parallelisms to the readers' real one. Similarly, using myths as a basis for YA fantasy stories allows the writers to enrich their range of stories by including a considerable diversity of options and variables. This Master's thesis will try to analyse how, in particular, Welsh and Celtic mythology as well as popular folklore play a central part in the YA fantasy series *The Raven Cycle* by Maggie Stiefvater. The aim is to assess the way in which these allusions are organically handled so as to sustain the saga's world and inner workings.

In order to carry out my intent, I will start providing an introduction to Young Adult fiction, focusing on the inclusion of myth and folklore in its narrative fabric and its inspirational and ultimately moral and didactic function. In this first section I will also address the concept of intertextuality as a convenient notion in order to account for the incorporation of mythology in contemporary fiction. Next, I will provide a short summary of Maggie Stiefvater's life and works, including her main narrative output: *The Raven Boys* saga. In the following section I will undertake my analysis of the treatment of mythology in the saga —an analysis that I will divide into subsections underpinned by the main specific allusions that I have been able to trace throughout this four-installment narrative: the legend of St. Mark's Eve, energy paths or ley lines, Welsh history and mythology (including figures like Owain Glyndwr and Gwenllian), as well as the importance of ravens, nature, and the number three. Lastly, the results obtained in this central section will be summarised in the thesis' conclusions, which together with several graphs will provide an answer to the research question proposed in this introduction.





## 1. MYTHOLOGY IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION & INTERTEXTUALITY

According to Maggie Stiefvater, the purpose of using magic in Young Adult fiction is to make the fictional story more real, since “myth paints things bigger and bolder” (Stiefvater, “The Power of Myth”). Indeed, fantastic literature often resorts to archetypes and symbolisms capable of highlighting universal truths (Fitzgerald 7) and providing a framework where readers may come to terms with conflicts and situations that are not easily made explicit otherwise (Fitzgerald 8). Such a view of the role of magic and mythology in YA fiction emphasizes their metaphorical power as a literary resource capable of communicating a more profound level of meaning that is deeply ingrained in the human psyche.

### 1.1. Use of myth & folklore in fantastic literature

Using myth and popular folklore as a solid base, writers of fantastic literature create imagined worlds that are rendered accessible to all types of readers, despite their unlikelihood, by introducing certain elements with which those readers are culturally acquainted (Sullivan 279). Thus, Sullivan asserts that such impossible, fantastic worlds contain enough familiar elements for the readers to understand the unfamiliar and fantastic ones (281). Nevertheless, including enough recognizable material for the readership can sometimes be a challenging task, since individual readers possess different levels of background knowledge regarding the world and the specific allusions that are interwoven within the literary text (292).

Some of the typically recurring elements in fantastic literature are the setting, provided by a magic, often perilous, forest (according to Marco R.S. Post, a motif inherited from the fairy tale tradition and revisited by modern classics of fantasy fiction like J.R.R. Tolkien), as well as the confrontation between the protagonist, aided by several companions, and a great evil which they have to defeat: a confrontation from which they return “. . . older, wiser and often wealthier...” (Sullivan 284). Later on, in this master’s thesis, I will try to prove that this fantastic framework is closely re-enacted in every single book of *The Raven Boys* saga in combination with other canonical traits of the fantastic genre and several less typical features. Ultimately, as stated by Sullivan, contemporary Young Adult fiction is not only about fantasy and science-fiction, no matter how strongly present these elements may be, but about the general experience of what it means to be human (292).

## 1.2. Insertion of teachings and values for the younger readers

In the more specific context of fantastic literature targeted at teenage audiences, the use of myth serves the purpose of strengthening the readers' connection and involvement with the narrative tending to populate them with all types of adventures that enable young readers to escape their stressful daily life and problems (Fitzgerald 9). Usually, the stories in this genre have young people as protagonists, which helps teenage readers realise their potentialities as they sympathize with the hero's call and the hardships the latter has to endure. Readers of YA fantasy can thus relate to the main character's role — one which parallels the difficulties they encounter in the process of growing up (Proukou 65), identifying themselves with the underdog hero, someone initially unimportant who eventually becomes essential (Fitzgerald 10). Similarly, as argued by Fitzgerald, the presence of evil in these fantasy stories gives teenagers a moral reference point, establishing behaviour boundaries and encouraging them to decide on their own (6) as well as teaching them to fight the status quo when they witness injustices (11), stand up for their personal beliefs, and support cultural diversity with the inclusion of different races, cultures, and languages (12). Young Adult fantasy “. . . is about life, its stories and potentialities, transformations and choices . . . is about conflicts between the claim of the individual and the claims of culture . . .”; it “. . . presents the world of imagination as real, not hallucinatory, feelings as reliable not deceitful, nature as essential not expandable, danger as challenging not demoralizing, enemies as teachers and adversaries, and life as. . . [not] exactly fair nor capricious.” (Proukou 62, 68). Consequently, YA fiction teaches teenagers to believe in themselves but also that everything comes with a cost (Fitzgerald 12), and that since “great power comes with terrible consequences” (Stiefvater, “The power of Myth”), they will not always win. The latter issue is central in Maggie Stiefvater's saga as I will discuss later on in this paper.

As a result of myth, fantasy and science-fiction providing a good vehicle to portray real daily issues and to convey certain values to the younger public, YA fiction writers often attempt to establish parallelisms between the magical/imaginary world in their stories and the real world outside (Okorafor). Apart from this being a device to bring the story closer to the reader and making the world's dynamics easier to understand, the stories in these books also deal, sometimes in a subtle way, with societal issues such as “. . . corruption and inequality in the criminal justice system”, women and girl empowerment, as well as racial and social injustices (Okorafor). These elements make

some YA fiction stories not simple tales of magic and mythology, but complex narratives that combine cultural roots and traditions with an element of social denunciation (Okorafor), helping to raise awareness in society.

### **1.3. Young Adult fantasy and intertextuality**

On the other hand, the *modus operandi* of contemporary popular writers of this kind of YA fiction seems to confirm the postmodern view that writers “can only imitate an ever anterior, never original gesture” (Barthes 53). The codes of fantastic literature for young readers are abundant with intertextual echoes as well as literary and cultural allusions, mythology being an important ingredient in their narrative fabric. Back in the 1960s, Julia Kristeva defined intertextuality as “. . . a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Martin 148): a principle that emphasizes the idea of imitation and mixture of pre-existing styles and challenges the belief in the uniqueness and originality of literary works (Martin 148, 149). At the very least, even a text that “. . . may appear to be spontaneous and transparent. . . must necessarily contain elements of other texts.” (Martínez Alfaro 278).

Intertextuality, and other concepts like collage, pastiche, metafiction, etc., foreground the conception of the text as a dialogue across writings instead of as something fixed (Martínez Alfaro 268), since everything is interrelated by virtue of partaking of a global culture (Martínez Alfaro 270). While the underlying notion can be traced back to Antiquity and the Middle Ages —e.g. Plato’s views of art as an imitation of an imitation, or the Bible’s influence on every other secular book being written (Martínez Alfaro 270)—, it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when “. . . the production of art and literature . . . has become an act of creation based on a re-cycling of previously existing works.” (Martínez Alfaro 271).

In tightly-coded YA fiction stories, the component of imitation and borrowing plays a central role. More particularly, YA fantasy literature uses mythology and popular folklore from different cultures as a rich soil where to construct its imagined magical worlds, characters, dynamics, and even plots. Myths often provide the narrative’s skeletal structure, one where the new writing is powerfully shaped by pre-existing tales and motifs. While from a post-structuralist perspective this may be asserted about any literary work, in the specific case of YA fantastic fiction we have a palpable instance of how the author of a text is at the same time writer and reader/re-writer (Martínez Alfaro 277): the

mediator of a thick meshwork of intertextual connections where mythical allusions and stereotypes are frequently transformed in the benefit of narrative interest, reader engagement and character and plot design.

## 2. MAGGIE STIEFVATER: LIFE AND WORK

Heidi Hummel, who would later change her name to Maggie Stiefvater, was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in November 1981. Since an early age she has been a lover of nature, animals, art and music, nowadays producing her own drawings and music pieces related to her literary work, which are published on her social media. She currently lives in Virginia, where the Raven Boys Cycle is set, with her husband, two kids and a number of animals (Stiefvater “My Story”).

Regarding her literary production, Stiefvater started writing at a young age, influenced by Madeleine L’Engle’s fantasy works, *The Black Cauldron* (1965) by Lloyd Alexander or the Narnia saga by C.S. Lewis among others (Staley 16), which introduced her to the dynamics of magic worlds. Apart from writing several articles about cars for magazines like *Road & Track* and *Jalopnik* (Stiefvater “My Story”), her career as a Young Adult Fiction writer started with the *Books of Faerie* series, dealing with Celtic faeries and mythology, that include *Lament: The Faerie Queen’s Deception* (2008) and *Ballad: A Gathering of Faerie* (2009), with the third instalment, *Requiem*, still being written (Stiefvater “Faerie”). Nevertheless, her recognition as a YA fantasy author came with her first #1 New York Times bestselling series, *The Wolves of Mercy Falls: Shiver* (2009), *Linger* (2010), and *Forever* (2011). The series deals with the myth of werewolves coexisting with humans and its consequences. A standalone companion to the trilogy was published in 2014: *Sinner*.

In 2011, Stiefvater published *The Scorpio Races* (2011), a story based on the Celtic and Scottish legend of each-uisge (each uisce in Irish), a mythical water horse (Stiefvater “Races”). The book was named Michael L. Printz Award Honor Book in 2012 (“Michael L. Printz Winners and Honor Books”) and is currently proposed for a film adaptation. Furthermore, Stiefvater has written paranormal short fiction, “The Hounds of Ulster”, which appeared in the collection *Kiss Me Deadly* (2010) (“The Hounds of Ulster”). She has been involved in two anthologies of short stories written together with Tessa Gratton and Brenna Yovanoff: *The Curiosities: A Collection of Stories* (2012), and *The Anatomy of Curiosity* (2015). She collaborated with Jackson Pearce in his book *Pip Bartlett’s Guide to Magical Creatures* (2015) and is likewise the author of the second book in the *Spirit Animals* series: *Hunted* (2014) (Stiefvater “Novels”). One of her latest works is *All*

*the Crooked Saints* (2017), a story of darkness and curses with Mexican folklore as the basis.

However, the works analysed in this paper belong to her second #1 New York Times bestselling series: *The Raven Cycle*. The saga is composed of four books, *The Raven Boys* (2012), *The Dream Thieves* (2013), *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* (2014), and *The Raven King* (2016). Nonetheless, in early 2018 a short novella set after the events in *The Raven King* was published under the title *Opal* (Stiefvater “Novels”). The story follows a group of young boys who become friends with Blue Sargent, a member of a psychic family, and together start an adventurous journey to find the tomb of the Welsh king Owain Glendower, supposedly in a lethargic magical sleep, who will grant them a wish if woken up. In the course of the narrative, the group of friends will find death curses, demons, a magical forest, mythological graceful creatures, and entities as well as objects made out of dreams, among others, that will shape them into the people they will become. The basis for the saga is Celtic mythology together with the mystery of the location of Glendower’s tomb. However, Stiefvater creates a magical world governed by a set of rules that fuses both Welsh history and Celtic folklore. These elements will be explored and analysed in the following section.

### 3. CELTIC AND WELSH MYTHOLOGY IN *THE RAVEN CYCLE*

#### 3.1. The legend of Saint Mark's Eve and ley lines

The first contact the reader has with the Raven Boys fictional world is through the legend of Saint Mark's Eve, introduced in the first pages of the first book, *The Raven Boys* (2012), which will play a crucial role throughout the whole of the four-book narrative. In the first chapter of *The Raven Boys* (2012), one of the saga's protagonists, Blue Sargent, spends the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, St. Mark's Eve, in the city's cemetery together with her psychic aunt Neeve, waiting for spirits to manifest themselves. This night is described by Neeve as “. . . a night for seers and psychics, witches and mediums.” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 7), implying that it is a night for the supernatural, a statement that is confirmed when the reader discovers that Blue and Neeve are in the churchyard waiting to see the souls of the people who will die in the next year (11). This is part of the Sargent family's job — to inform the people or the relatives of those whose spirits they see on St. Mark's Eve so they can solve their issues before dying.

The legend of St. Mark's Eve was part of the popular folklore for a long time, and rested on the belief that spirits from those who were to die during the following twelve months would appear that night at cemeteries and enter the churches (Harris 16). For instance, the practice of visiting the churchyard at night in order to watch these apparitions was popular throughout all England from the 17<sup>th</sup> until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (“St. Mark's Eve”).

Nevertheless, the belief that boundaries between the mortal and the spiritual world were diffused during certain times of the year, especially when seasons changed, already existed in Celtic culture (Wood 94). The Celtic folklore had certain magical times when the limits between both worlds were believed to be almost non-existent (Wood 98). According to Wood, one of these remarkable dates was the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, called Samhain by the Celts, which marked the end of summer and the beginning of a new year in their calendars (98), and when most of the significant events in Celtic mythology happened (99). One of the phenomena that the Celts believed took place during the eve of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October was the alteration of the normal order of the universe: “. . . the barriers between the natural and the supernatural are temporarily removed, the sídh lies open and all divine beings and the spirits of the dead move freely among men and interfere, sometimes violently, in their affairs.” (MacCana 127). This ancient belief is

directly linked to what later in popular folklore will be known as the legend of Saint Mark's Eve, which Maggie Stiefvater chose to include in her Raven Boys world. In her fictional world, the spirits of the dead travel along the 'corpse road', also called ley line, which is defined as ". . . a perfectly straight, supernatural path that connected spiritual places. . ." (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 24). These energy paths or ley lines are significantly difficult to detect as they are underground and the energy they emanate is irregular and faint since their natural state is to be 'dormant' or 'sleeping' until someone wakes them up by performing a ritual (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 89).

### **3.1.1. Ley lines: supernatural energy lines across the world**

In 1925, photographer Alfred Watkins (1855 – 1935) proposed the theory that places in England such as ancient sites, standing stones, and burial mounds, which he believed were ". . . natural points of power in the earth.", were connected through ancient straight lines he called ley lines (Buckland 229). Watkins believed these ley lines indicated the path followed by subtle earth energies and that "where two or more leys cross is a power point that has, in the past, naturally drawn people to assemble or build structures such as standing stones, barrows, temples and churches." (Buckland 229). He also located several ley lines across England, one of them, Montgomery ley, situated on the Welsh border and including six important sites (Buckland 229). In the saga, Stiefvater indicates that there are three major ley lines across the USA forming a triangle, also an important shape which will be later commented on, one of them crossing Virginia, a state which serves as the setting for *The Raven Boys*' narrative. Another important ley line in this fictional world is called Hanmer Road and is located near a magical forest which will be a major protagonist throughout the saga (Stiefvater "Dream Thieves" 187). It is to be noted that this ley line near the magical forest, which will be key in the finding of Glendower's tomb, receives the surname of Glendower's wife, Margaret Hanmer ("Margaret Hanmer").

Certainly, these energy paths possess magical functions according to specific rules the protagonists of the story have to unveil by themselves, discovering for instance which is the 'heart' of the ley line, where most of the energy lies (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 222), or how much magic can be used at the same time since if it is an overwhelming amount, the ley line will run out of power (Stiefvater "Dream Thieves" 355). As Stiefvater states in the first book of the saga, *The Raven Boys* (2012), the characteristic properties of these



magical paths include the protection of the souls, which are thus enabled to manifest themselves by using this energy as long as the corpse is buried on the ley line (220); the transformation of time into a circular instead of linear process — “. . . a fluid thing . . .” (235)—; and most importantly, that ley lines work through reciprocity and sacrifice (102).

Through the latter, Stiefvater conveys the idea, previously explored in this paper, that magic always has a cost, that a price has to be paid in order to obtain magic’s favour. For instance, for one of the protagonists, Gansey, to be saved from an imminent death while on the ley line, another person must be dying also on the ley line (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 278). However, the sacrifice needed to acquire magic’s favour does not always have to imply death, it can also involve giving up a part of your inner self, as in the case of another lead character, Adam, who sacrifices his free will and puts himself completely under the orders of the magical forest in order to prevent the place’s disappearance: an exchange where the sacrifice exacted is not about killing but about what one is willing to lose in return for magic’s favour (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 405).

The implication that magic, power, victory comes with a cost is reinforced throughout all the saga, where the young protagonists learn the lesson by being forced to make difficult decisions that involve losing things and people they care about in the process. Related to this, there is one of the most distinguishing features of the ley lines in this narrative: they have to be woken up through a ritual that requires a sacrifice for them to become more visible, so that they can eventually be found (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 89). Whoever performs this “wake-up ritual” will benefit from the ley line’s favours, since the magical path will be in their debt (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 256). Therefore, depending on the person who woke it up, the magic occurring in the ley line can be good or bad, and although dark things will happen if blood is spilled on the ley line while performing the ritual (Stiefvater “Raven King” 328), such paths can only create, never destroy, as their ancient magic was created with that purpose (Stiefvater “Raven King” 424).

### **3.2. The influence of Glyndwr’s figure and Welsh history in the saga**

Owain Glyndwr (1349 – unknown) was a descendant of several ancient royal Welsh houses whose lineage can be traced back to a period before the Norman Conquest (“Owain Glyndwr”). As he fought in Richard II’s army against the Scots, his loyalty was rewarded with the title of knight. However, once Richard was deposed by Henry IV,

Glyndwr retired to Wales lamenting the situation (Mervinius 18). According to Mervinius, the subjugation suffered by the Welsh people at the hands of the English crown, together with Henry IV's refusal to hear Glyndwr's dispute against his neighbour Reginald Grey, who supported Henry IV, over an illegal land appropriation, made Glyndwr revolt against the English and, supported by various nobles and the Welsh population, declared himself Prince of Wales in 1400 (18, 19). Consequently, Henry IV marched with an army across Wales making Glyndwr retreat into the mountains and start a guerrilla warfare that lasted until 1402, when the Welsh, motivated by the sighting of a comet, became victorious (Mervinius 20). However, the situation changed when in 1412 Glyndwr and his men suffered constant defeats and he decided to withdraw himself to the mountains in the interior of Wales, little being known about him from then on ("Owain Glyndwr").

Despite the lack of information about his last years, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century his seal and some of his letters were discovered, which triggered off a revival of his figure as a national leader for the Welsh nation, subsequently becoming an icon of mass culture in Wales with statues, monuments, pubs and street names in his honour ("Owain Glyndwr"). Furthermore, in his play *Henry IV* Shakespeare portrayed Glyndwr as ". . . a wild, exotic, magical and spiritual man, playing up the romantic 'Celtic' traits." ("Owain Glyndwr"). Still nowadays, Glyndwr's destiny after he retreated into the Welsh mountains, how and when he died, as well as the location of his tomb remain an unsolved mystery.

Throughout *The Raven Boys* saga, Stiefvater plays with Glyndwr's historical figure and the mystery surrounding him, adjusting it to fit into her fictional world. In the series' second book, *The Dream Thieves* (2013), it is stated that after fighting the British and hiding, Glendower's body was taken to America sometime between 1412 and 1420 (21). This was done with the purpose of burying his body on a ley line to keep his soul intact so centuries later he could come back to life and be a hero again for the Welsh nation. The burial could not take place anywhere in Wales since his enemies would probably look for his tomb in order to tarnish it (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 221). Some experts like John Hughes, author of *Glyndwr's Daughter* (2012), believe Glyndwr could have sought refuge and hidden with one of his ten children, her illegitimate daughter Gwenllian (Shipton), that also appears in the saga and whose character will be later analysed in this paper.

In the narrative, Glendower is supposedly buried asleep together with two more sleepers, although some stories about him being alone or “. . . surrounded by dozens of sleeping knights who woke up with him.” (Stiefvater “Raven King” 376) are mentioned. The peculiarity of being buried asleep could be based on The Seven Sleepers legend, which involves seven young Christians hiding in a cave while escaping from Christian persecutions around 250 AD (“Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”). According to the legend, the seven sleepers fell into a deep sleep inside the cave and woke up when the cavern was reopened 200 years later (“Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”). A parallel between the situation of these Christians and Glendower’s could be easily established since all of them were running from a persecution and fell into a profound slumber in a cave in order to save their lives. According to Henken, several Welsh legends assure that “. . . Glyndwr awaits the proper hour [to return to Wales] asleep in a cave.” (75), together with some of his men, also asleep, with their armour prepared waiting for the day they have to fight for their country again (69). When at the end of the saga, the protagonists find Glendower’s tomb, it is nothing similar to what one may have expected from a prince: a simple room with a low ceiling and bare walls where Glendower sits on the floor, with an armour on top, unburied, sword at his left, and cup at his right (Stiefvater “Raven King” 377). The bare state of his tomb could be interpreted as a manifestation of the disappointment the protagonists feel when they discover Glendower has indeed been dead for centuries and will never wake up, come back to life, and grant them a wish as some prophecies promised (Stiefvater “Raven King” 380). Nevertheless, the significance of an armour, a shield, on top of Glendower’s corpse is actually important since this practice was done in Celtic tribes in order to protect the deceased’s soul after death (Wood 130).

### **3.2.1. Glendower’s figure as a legend**

Throughout the narrative several magical elements are attributed to the figure of Glendower such as the power of invisibility (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 44), his travelling with mages as his advisers and protectors (Stiefvater “Blue Lily” 65), his capacity to control the weather with his speech (Stiefvater “Raven King” 73), and most importantly, his ability to talk with ravens, stated constantly along the saga: “Legend had it that Glendower could speak to ravens. . .” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 96), “There were so many stories of Glendower knowing the language of birds. So many stories of ravens whispering secrets to him.” (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 264), “Glendower had [...] spoken to birds . . .” (Stiefvater “Raven King” 73). Furthermore, Glendower is addressed

as Raven King in each book of the series, especially in the phrase “Make way for the Raven King”, present in all of them and commonly uttered by ravens, creating a more significant bond between his character and the animals. The significance of ravens in *The Raven Boys* saga will be discussed below in this paper. However, and to finish this discussion of Glyndwr’s figure in the saga, both, reality and fiction, are consistent with the statement that he “. . . could be a hero or a villain depending on where you regarded him from.” (Stiefvater “Raven King” 376): an observation likewise made by Mervinius when he contrasts Glyndwr’s cruel and sanguinary side with his heroism in rebelling against the British to defend his people (26).

### **3.2.2. Gwenllian: Owain Glyndwr’s illegitimate daughter**

The figure of Glendower is closely related in the narrative to that of Gwenllian, his illegitimate daughter. In the saga Gwenllian is buried alive in a cave on the ley line as a punishment for rebelling against his father’s poet, adviser, and wizard, Iolo Goch, her tomb serving as a lure for those in search of Glendower’s body with the intention of desecrating it. The tomb is richly decorated, with paintings, jewels, statues of knights guarding it, a stone coffin beautifully adorned with Glendower’s image on it, every detail suitable of an important figure like the Prince of Wales. Nevertheless, when the protagonists open the coffin and find Gwenllian, she is not buried as an important dignitary would have been in medieval times, but in exactly the opposite fashion. Her body is placed face down and although she wears a purple tunic, historically the colour that represents royalty, her hands and knees are tied in the way medieval people “. . . buried witches. Suicides. Criminals. Prisoners.” (Stiefvater “Blue Lily” 217).

Indeed, although there is little information about witchcraft in archaeological records (Hodgson 10), in the Middle Ages, people believed to be related to the supernatural world, especially to the devil, were buried face down to prevent their spirits from rising from the grave as it was a common belief that the soul left the body through its mouth (Griffiths). Thus, if the corpse was placed face down, it would “. . . prevent the impure soul threatening the living.” (Griffiths). Besides, this type of burial was commonly used as a punishment to humiliate the dead person, while being buried alive face down, as in Gwenllian’s case, was considered the most cruel and degrading form of this practice (Griffiths).

Nevertheless, little is known about the actual historical figure of Gwenllian, the majority of the existing references are done through poems belonging to 15<sup>th</sup>-century poets like Lewis Glyn or Ieuan Gyfannedd. The bard Lewis Glyn mentions Owain Glyndwr as Gwenllian's father in one of his compositions (Cothi 400), while in Ieuan Gyfannedd's poem he praises Gwenllian as well as the kindness of her husband, Phylip ap Rhys of Cenarth, stating that the former was Glyndwr's illegitimate daughter (Suggett 61).

### **3.2.3. Inclusion of Welsh culture & history in the saga**

Finally, several mentions to Welsh history and some of its landmarks take place throughout the saga's narrative. Firstly, important names in Welsh history appear as the story develops, such as King Arthur, King Alfred, poets Iolo Goch and Gruffudd Llwyd, who also wrote poems about Glyndwr (Henken 57), prince Llewellyn the Great, and his descendant, the Welsh soldier Owain Lawgoch. At the beginning of the first book, it is stated that there is historical support for a Welsh landing in America even before Christopher Columbus (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 46) although no evidence is given apart from a series of Welsh-influenced names of places near the protagonists' city, Henrietta, for instance Welsh Hills, Glen Bower, Harlech, Machinleth (84). This could be related to the "Madoc story" that supported this pre-Columbus Welsh landing and which will be commented on later in the conclusions of this dissertation. Nonetheless, proper references to Welsh mythology and history are also included in the narrative: Glendower is tagged as Mab Darogan, a designation that in Welsh mythology stood for a "messianic figure of the Sovereign Returned" (Ingham 5); Cadair Idris, one of the most iconic mountains in Wales: the seat for the giant Idris and part of the hunting territory of Gwyn ap Nudd's, Lord of the Underworld ("Local Legend at Cadair Idris"); the town of Sycharth, traditionally described as Glyndwr's home (Henken 57); Urien, a British mythological figure, one of four ancient warriors, and an Arthurian hero (Monaghan 463) who is referred to as Glendower's mythological father (Stiefvater "Dream Thieves" 193); or the comet which in 1402 crossed Wales, as recorded in one of Iolo Goch's poems (Constantine 109), and instigated Glyndwr's army to fight the British: an allusion recaptured in the narrative when Gwenllian, his daughter, is freed from her grave (Stiefvater "Blue Lily" 223).

Furthermore, one of the main protagonists, Richard Gansey, has a copy of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* or the Welsh Triads at his home (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 76). According to MacQueen, the Welsh Triads are “. . . an index to the body of Welsh oral traditional narrative. . .” (66) that constitute a constant reference for those who study Celtic literature, traditions, and Arthurian origins (67). In an entry included in the collection *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* (2017), Juliette Wood, an expert in Celtic studies, states that the triads:

. . . are an index of persons, events, objects, and places from Welsh traditional history, mythology and less frequently, folklore, gathered into groups of three . . . they provide a unique record of the narrative tradition available to the poets and story-tellers of medieval Wales [and] reflect a shared sense of the past in Wales. . . . (“Welsh Triads” 1896, 1900)

There are other more subtle mentions to Celtic culture in the narrative such as the raven statue in the protagonists’ home having Welsh script on it (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 37) or one of the protagonists, Ronan Lynch, listening to Celtic music from a very young age and being deeply influenced by it (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 163). One of the main characters in the narrative is Professor Roger Malory, a ley line and Glendower scholar, “. . . one of the prime authorities on British ley lines.” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 88). He shares his surname with Thomas Malory, the author of *Le Morte D’Arthur* (circa 1469), the quintessential prose account of Arthurian legend in English (“Thomas Malory’s ‘Le Morte Darthur’ ”), constituting an important part of the Arthurian tradition, whose materials, according to Sullivan, are the most popular and influential for modern fantasy writers (285), such as Stiefvater. Roger Malory’s character could be also related to the men who discovered and studied ley lines during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred Watkins (1855-1935) and particularly John Michell (1933 – 2009), whose background shares several aspects in common with Stiefvater’s Roger Malory, both being British highbrow scholars who dedicated part of their lives to study ley lines (Williamson). It is quite likely that in creating the fictional character, the fantasy writer drew upon these historical figures for roundness and accuracy.

### **3.3. The image and symbolism of ravens**

Ravens are a constant and major element throughout the whole narrative, where they are steadily present in the protagonists’ lives as well as in relation with Glendower’s figure. To the already mentioned ability of Glendower to talk to ravens, the latter are

directly described as”. . . Glendower’s bird. . .” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 96): a link between the hero and these creatures that remains active for the rest of the narrative.

Furthermore, throughout the four books subtle but repeated appearances of ravens can be found: one of the protagonists, Ronan, adopts a raven as his pet: “. . . the irony that one of the raven boys actually possessed a raven.” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 311); the magical forest, central in the story, is located on a raven-shaped hill (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 215); the emblem of the high school that some of the protagonists attend is a raven, which accounts for the surname “the Raven Boys”; the protagonists’ city, Henrietta, described as “. . . a town known for its ravens.” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 96); a man-made lake surrounded with crows (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 187) becomes the place where the group of teenagers makes significant discoveries about Glendower, such as finding a shield that belonged to him with “. . . three ravens embossed on it. . . three ravens marked in a triangle. . .” (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 192, 193); the tomb of Gwennlian, Glendower’s illegitimate daughter, is full of references to ravens, with a stone knight whose head rests on two ravens, walls with carved ravens, and “a stone effigy of Glendower [...] his helmeted head pillowed on three carved ravens” (Stiefvater “Blue Lily” 214); similar decorations featured on Glendower’s own tomb with “. . . a raven-carved stone door [...] carved with ravens upon ravens” (Stiefvater “Raven King” 375). Likewise, “. . . a headless statue of a [raven] with *king* carved on its belly in Welsh” (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 37) is permanently kept in the basement of Montmouth, where the Raven Boys live.

An allusion must be made as well to the already mentioned constant references in relation to Glendower’s association with birds throughout all four books, as well as the appearances of ravens shouting “Rex Corvus, parate Regis Corvi” translated in the saga as “The Raven King, make way for the Raven King” (Stiefvater “Blue Lily” 26 & “Raven King” 342).

Historically, the image of ravens has had a notable importance in a number of cultures and their mythologies, mostly associated with death and prophecy. In Greek mythology they were associated with the god Apollo, bearer of prophecies, becoming symbols of bad luck for conveying misfortunes: a similar role to the one they had in Norse mythology, where they were the messengers of Odin’s divinations. In Irish mythology they were related to the goddess Morrigan, associated with war and fate, the messenger

of warrior's destinies, which she sometimes conveyed through ravens. In Celtic culture, Morrígan, a three-person deity, also received the name of Badhbh or Badb, Goddess of Death, who frequently transformed herself into a crow to bear bad news (Wood 64).

Another Celtic figure strongly related to birds, although whether or not these are ravens is unknown, was Rhiannon, the goddess of war and death who had three birds that ". . . could sing the dead to life and the living into the sleep of death." (Squire 193). The three birds of Rhiannon and their capacity to sing could be related to the ravens that appear in the saga to announce Glendower's coming.

### **3.4. Importance and significance of the number three**

In relation to ravens, their prophetic nature, and the fact that in the narrative they appear mostly in trios, it is worth discussing the importance of the number three in Stiefvater's saga. Already in the first book, *The Raven Boys* (2012), it is stated how important things come in threes and sevens (109, 110), a point later made in *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* (2014), where the powerfulness and importance of number three (316) is emphasised to the point of labelling it as ". . . the number of the divine."(219). The significance that this particular number has in the story is shown through its regular inclusion in it: the three ley lines which cross the USA forming a triangle and are described as "the ones that seem to matter as far as finding Glendower" (Stiefvater "Raven Boys" 211); the already mentioned three ravens in Glendower's shield and three ravens carved on a pillow in Glendower's statue; the prophecy about three sleepers buried in a cave, one of them being Glendower himself (Stiefvater "Blue Lily" 7, 133, 139); and the need for three psychics to have a better vision (Stiefvater "Blue Lily" 316), since they are ". . . an inseparable three-headed entity that shared decision making equally." (Stiefvater "Raven King" 121).

Historically, the symbolism and importance of the number three has always existed across different cultures. Aristotle already asserted that triads represent completeness since they have a beginning, a middle, and an end (Lease 69). As stated by Lease, triads of gods and goddesses can be found in a significant number of mythologies around the world: Ancient Greece with Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades (58); India with Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu (63); the Vedic Gods Agni, Indra, and Surya (63); Egypt with two trinities, the main one composed by Isis, Osiris, and Horus (64); the Germanic triad with Wodan,



Thorr, and Donar (64); as well as Celtic mythology and its three different families of Gods named children of Dôn, children of Nudd, and children of Llyr, the main gods in that culture (Squire 181). Moreover, in the realm of mythology some legendary creatures appear in triads as well, like cyclops and moirae, or monsters with triplicated parts of the body such as the Hydra with three heads (Lease 58), and objects of power like the trident (Lease 63) or Zeus' thunderbolt being trifurcated (Lease 59). Moreover, in *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* (2014), one of the three psychics, Persephone, makes reference to “. . . a three-lady-god. . . One's named War . . .” (316), probably referring to the already mentioned Celtic Goddess Morrigan.

Likewise, in the Catholic religion it is believed that the origin of humanity can be traced back to the descendants of Noah's three sons (Lease 64, 66), together with the representation of God through three different entities, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, mentioned in the saga by one of the psychics, Persephone, as the “. . .three Jesuses.” (Stiefvater “Blue Lily” 316); the triple division of the hereafter with hell, heaven, and the purgatory (Lease 66), Paul denying Jesus Christ three times, the divine virtuous Catholic family composed by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and lastly the three exemplary plagues Egypt has to suffer in order to be cleansed and free the Jews. Similarly, in Celtic mythology, one God, Nudd, puts an end to three supernatural plagues his people suffer (Squire 181).

Later, in Irish and Welsh medieval literature, the number three would be used as a narrative resource more than a powerful and supernatural symbol (Wood 63). However, in popular folklore this number remained crucial in most of the cultures, especially in rituals since “it has been observed that triplication may have an intensifying force and that it may also convey the concept of totality.” (MacCana 49). In Celtic culture for example, triads were considered one of the most important and recurrent symbols as they represented a symbol for continuity (past, present, future), importance as well mentioned in the saga by Persephone: “. . . Three. Past, present, future.” (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 357), and to define the complexity of the universe (earth, heaven, hell) (Wood 60). Practices like sacrificing three kids or three lambs on three different altars during an expiatory rite that lasted three days and three nights was common in pagan rituals in the 17<sup>th</sup> century B.C., as well as carrying three different charms for protection or spitting thrice on the floor to close a spell or scare demons away (Lease 61, 62). Consequently, for the reasons explained above, the figure of the triangle was also important in several

cultures as it represented a strong and powerful symbol. This widespread belief is transferred to *The Raven Boys* saga and adapted to the narrative: three raven boys that meet the other protagonist, Blue, three sleepers in the cave, three ravens on Glendower's shield, three ley lines that cross each other along the USA forming a powerful triangle, three main psychics in Blue's family, three Lynch brothers, one of them being Ronan, a major protagonist, etc.

### **3.5. Role of nature in the saga**

Nature plays a significant role in the saga becoming a key character throughout the whole narrative and being as important as any of the human protagonists.

Firstly, the role of trees supports the supernatural and magical elements in the story with their descriptions: “. . . an old copse of ash trees where the energy levels were always high.”, “. . . a sinister group of oak trees. . . [with] old words carved into one of the trunks.” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 101). Furthermore, a magical forest named Cageswater is a major player in the story, constituting the place where the teenagers have to face challenges, and from where they return older, wiser, and wealthier (Sullivan 284). The first time the group visits this area in *The Raven Boys* (2012), Cageswater is described as an exceptionally beautiful place, profoundly alive (224), and completely covered in green (226), turning the forest into a holy site (343). Besides, its trees can communicate with the protagonists either in Latin, “ ‘*Arbores loqui latine*’ ” (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 250), or through a puzzle box the teenagers find that can translate into different languages, one of them being the language of trees (Stiefvater “Dream Thieves” 416). Thus, Cageswater fulfils the purpose of magical forests in fantasy, being a place of comfort and safety for the protagonists, allowing them to escape reality, functioning as a frontier between the mundane and the magical world, as well as a place where their courage and capacities will be tested to prove their worth (Post 68, 69).

Moreover, as stated by Wood, in Celtic culture forests played a significant role since they were considered to be sacred natural places to venerate gods, spirits and souls (32), and although they were seen as powerful yet dangerous spaces, they were commonly used as sanctuaries (50). Nevertheless, almost at the end of the narrative, in *The Raven King* (2016), Cageswater is described as being “. . . not a forest. Cageswater was a thing that

happened to look like a forest right now. This was a peculiar magic that meant that it was always very old and very young at once.” (424), reinforcing the magical traits of the place.

Likewise, nature and magic stay closely intertwined throughout the narrative, as exemplified by the claim that ley lines are marked by visible, physical features like a drawing in an animal’s shape in order to facilitate their identification from a high viewpoint, as happens with the Nazca lines —a group of vast trenches in a southern Peruvian desert—and the Uffington White Horse in Britain (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 213, 214), all of them hill figures dated thousands of years ago.

Particularly in the case of the Uffington White Horse, the figure is dated to the Bronze or the Iron Age (“History of Uffington”) and is Britain’s oldest and most famous hill figure (“Uffington White Horse”), although the function it had in that society is still not clear (“History of Uffington”). Some of its possible meanings would relate to the representation of the Celtic Goddess Epona, who symbolized fertility, healing, and death; the worshipping of its figure in religious ceremonies, since its shape is similar to the horses present in Celtic jewellery (“Uffington White Horse”); or the marking of territory (“History of Uffington”).



Uffington horse, Oxfordshire, England. (Credits: Chris Eilbeck (Youtube))



Nazca lines, Nazca desert, Peru (Credits: Martin Bernetti)

Throughout Stiefvater's narrative, the most important discoveries and the most unusual occurrences take place either in caves or in areas with an important volume of water, such as the man-made lake. This is significant since, according to Wood, in Celtic culture watery areas were major locations to perform rituals and make offerings that were thrown into the water, like jewels, shields or weapons (35). As previously said, in *The Dream Thieves* (2013) the protagonists discover Glendower's shield at the bottom of a man-made lake (192) which could be related to such Celtic rituals and offerings.

Furthermore, an important and frequent element in Celtic mythology was metamorphosis: turning into an animal or tree is a recurring motif among the Celtic legends and myths (Wood 96). In the last book of the saga, *The Raven King* (2016), a new kind of creature called *tir e e'lintes*, or tree-lights, is introduced and described as humans who can fuse with trees, being able to live and hide inside them (326). The *tir e e'lintes* are souls who can adopt a human or a tree-like appearance (Stiefvater "Raven King" 327) by virtue of their power to morph into either shape.

Lastly, nature plays a key role in the performance of rituals as well, reaffirming its importance in relation to the magical world. Throughout the series, it can be appreciated that most of the elements used in these ceremonies belong to the natural world. In *The Raven Boys* (2012), for instance, such rituals involve a candle on the roots of a beech tree and next to a pool of black water (171), a circle of magnetically charged stones where if one of them is pushed out of place, the energy is unbalanced (179), or leg bones of three

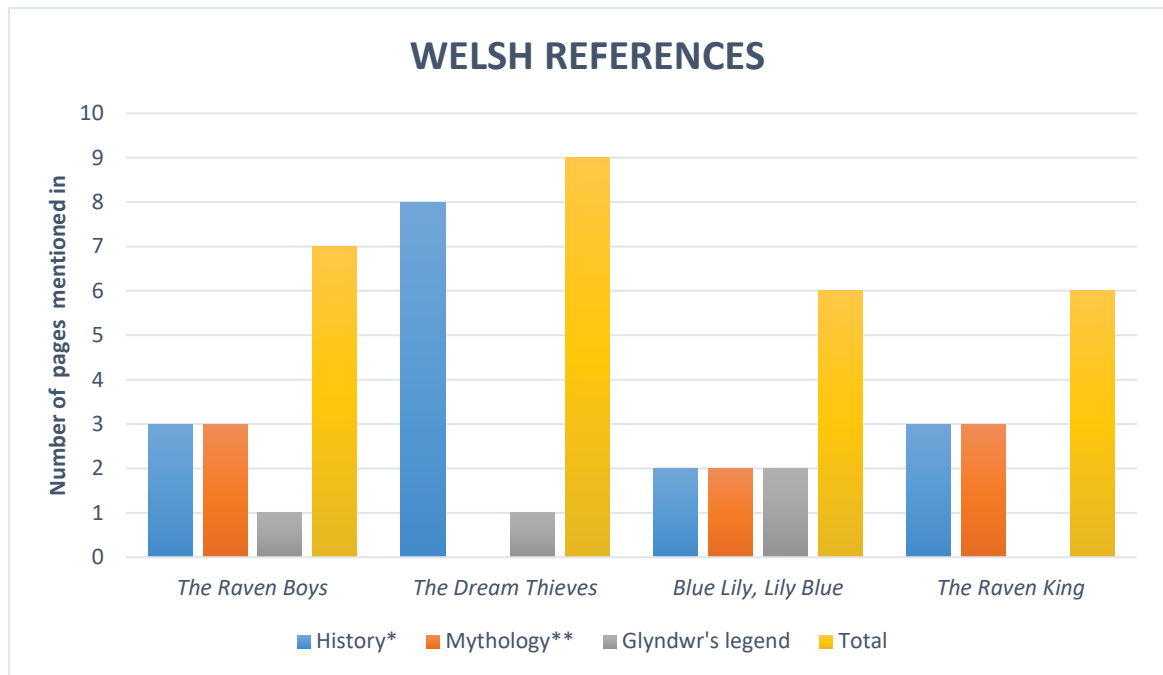
ravens killed on the ley line (396). Nevertheless, and restating again the idea that magic and power always come with a cost —the price that must be paid in order to obtain the benefits of magic—, it should be noted that if a ritual fails there are consequences (Stiefvater “Raven Boys” 100): dark outcomes, such as being stuck in a limbo, dying, or permanently hearing voices, happen in such cases.



#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The contents of this paper have shown the notable influence of Welsh/Celtic culture, folklore, and mythology in Maggie Stiefvater's saga *The Raven Boys*. This can be traced in the inclusion of different Celtic customs like burying a corpse with an armour on top to protect the soul, a posture in which the protagonists find Glendower in his tomb; the belief that forests, such as Cageswater in the saga, were sacred places for the Celts and consequently, used as sanctuaries; the function of watery areas as locations to perform rituals and make offerings involving artefacts like shields similar to the one discovered by the teenagers in a lake and believed to have belonged to Glendower; or the existence of creatures like the *tir e'lintes*, souls capable of adopting at will a human or tree-like form, metamorphosis being a common resource in Celtic legends and mythology.

Further allusions from Celtic/Welsh mythology and history include a succession of proper names that feature prominently in *The Raven Boys* saga, for instance: King Arthur, Iolo Goch, Gruffudd Llwyd, Llewellyn the Great, Owain Lawgoch, Glyndwr's wife's surname (Hanmer), the mountain Cadair Idris, the town of Scycharth, or the title of Mab Darogan, the comet sighted in 1402, the Welsh Triads (*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*), and several Welsh-influenced place names (e.g. Welsh Hills, Harlech, Machinleth, etc.). These echoes and references to Celtic culture help to create a mysterious atmosphere related to the medieval past and confer the story and the supernatural elements in Stiefvater's world with some degree of plausibility. Furthermore, a parallelism between historical fact and fiction is established in the figure of Owen Glendower- his sudden disappearance, the mystery surrounding his death and the site of his tomb, together with the Welsh legends about him being asleep in a cave, waiting to be woken up to fight again for his country. As shown in the following graph, the amount of references to Welsh history and mythology is constant throughout the four books, being more frequent in the second one, *The Dream Thieves* (2013), where a considerable amount of background information concerning Welsh history and Glendower is provided.



\* The category “History” includes references to Welsh kings, history of Wales, and Welsh language.

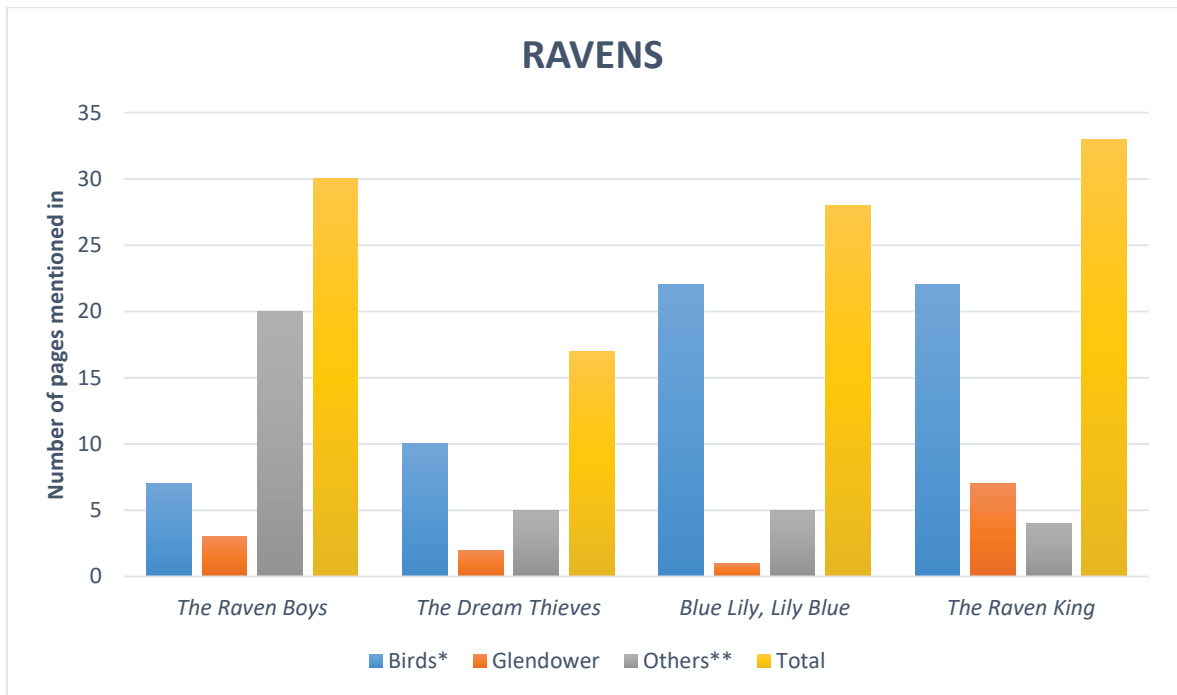
\*\* The category “Mythology” includes Welsh mythology and folklore.

Additional elements included in the saga’s narrative that belong both to Celtic culture and to popular folklore are the legend of Saint Mark’s Eve, and the important symbolism surrounding the figure of ravens and the number three. As previously stated in this paper, the legend of St. Mark’s Eve was not exclusively a Celtic tradition although it was devoutly celebrated in this culture, constituting a magical night when souls would wander the earth as a consequence of the new Celtic year beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, also called Samhain.

On the other hand, and as proved by the above analysis, one of the most important symbolic allusions throughout the saga is the one related to ravens. These are a recurring presence throughout the narrative, including all four books, particularly in connection with the character of Glendower. The hero’s ability to communicate with ravens is stated several times and earns him the title of ‘The Raven King’: an epithet repeatedly uttered by the birds in the sentence “Make way for the Raven King”. Ravens also constitute a recurrent image found in tombs, shields, statues, etc. Likewise, the image of ravens is consistently present across several mythologies, mostly as the embodiment of prophecy bearers and frequently related to the image of death. Particularly, in the case of Celtic mythology, the Goddess Morrígan, or Badhbh/Badb, who symbolized death, could transform herself into a raven in order to convey their fatidic destinies to the warriors.



Thus, the image of ravens in Celtic culture, closely related to bad news and death, is characteristically present in Stiefvater’s saga where their inclusion in a scene creates a mysterious and discomfoting atmosphere. Furthermore, the appearance of ravens mostly in trios and in relation with Glendower could be related to the three birds of Rhiannon, Goddess of war and death in Celtic culture, which “. . . could sing the dead to life and the living into the sleep of death.” (Squire 193).



\* The category “Birds” includes mentions to common ravens, Ronan’s raven pet, references to the “raven cave” or “cave of ravens” (*Blue Lily, Lily Blue* and *The Raven King*), and images of ravens in shields or door/wall carvings (all except *The Raven Boys*)

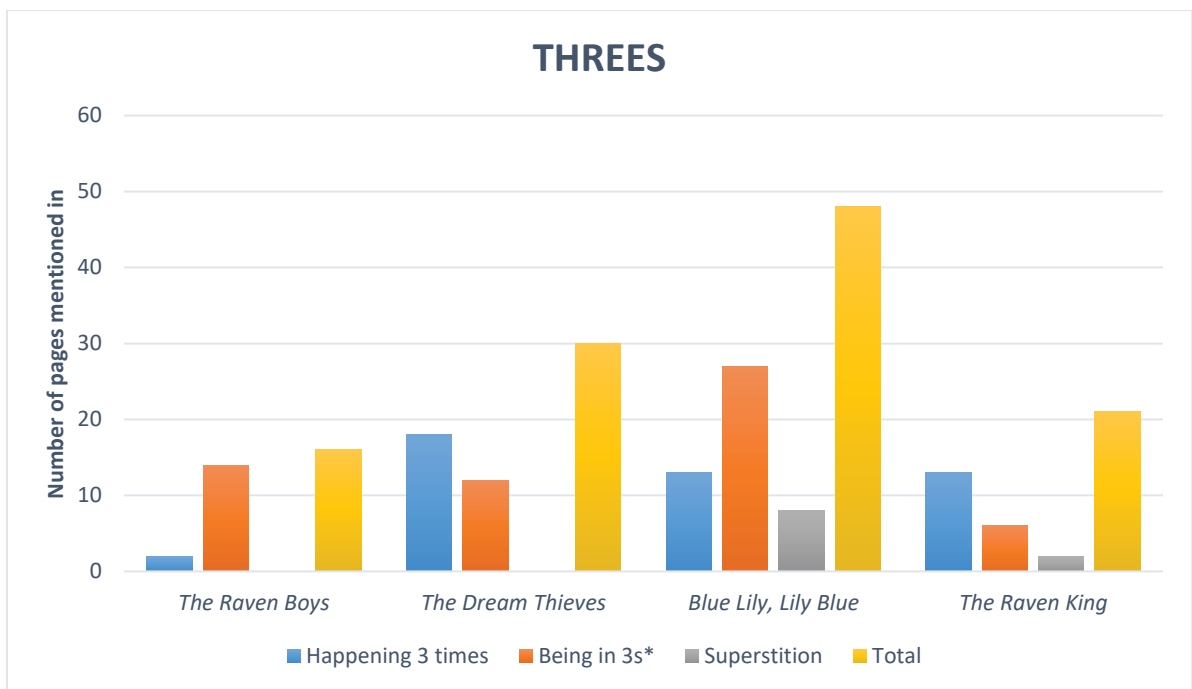
\*\* The category “Others” includes mentions to the male protagonists’ uniform with an embroidered raven (*The Raven Boys* and *The Dream Thieves*), references to the male protagonists as a group named raven boys, and mentions of one of the protagonists’, Ronan Lynch, as the Raven Prince or related to ravens (*Blue Lily, Lily Blue* and *The Raven King*).

As can be appreciated in the previous graph, mention of ravens as birds increases as the narrative develops through the four books. However, references to Glendower in relation with them decrease as the story focuses on the hardships that the protagonists have to face in order to find Glendower, and, consequently, as in the fourth book they approach this discovery, references start to rise again.

Another significant and recurring element in *The Raven Boys* saga that pertains to several mythologies, including the Celts’, as well as to popular folklore, concerns the use

of the number three. Historically, this number has always been considered important, as can be seen in the grouping of gods and goddesses in triads of deities in most mythologies (Greek, Indian, Egyptian, etc.), as well as the appearance of monsters and giant creatures such as cyclops in the same numerical arrangement. The significance of triads is also evident in the Catholic religion: the concept of God in three different entities (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the triple division of the hereafter into hell, heaven, and purgatory, the worshipping of the Holy Family composed by Mary, Jesus, and Joseph, etc.

More specifically in the context of this paper’s inquiry, traditional Celtic lore features the division of deities into three main families- the children of Dôn, the children of Nudd, and the children of Llyr-, the Celts’ belief in triads being a representation of continuity- past, present, and future-, and their threefold conception of the universe- earth, heaven, hell. The number three was also common in pagan rituals where, for instance, three sacrifices were performed on three different altars, or some rites lasted three days and three nights. It was also a widespread belief among the population that one had to carry three different charms for protection, or spit three times to make a spell effective. In tune with such hints of common lore, in *The Raven Boys* saga, the number three is also a recurrent motif: three psychics, three male friends who meet the female protagonist, three sleepers in a cave, among which is Glendower, three ley lines forming a triangle, three ravens on Glendower’s shield, etc. reinforcing the narrative completeness of Stiefvater’s cycle and further enriching the density of its universe of allusions.



\* The category “Being in 3s” includes references to groups of three people, but also triads in reference to ley lines (*The Raven Boys*), raven boys (*The Raven Boys* and *The Dream Thieves*), the Lynch brothers (all except *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*), ravens, psychics (both included in *The Dream Thieves* and *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*), sleepers (*Blue Lily, Lily Blue*), deer (*Blue Lily, Lily Blue* and *The Raven King*), knights, Jesuses, and Gods (these last three being only present in *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*)

In the graph shown above it can be seen how the number three plays an important role in the saga, reflected in the increasing number of references throughout the full narrative cycle. Surprisingly, the largest amount is included in the third book, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* (2014), where the references to being in threes as well as to the superstition about how things done by threes will have a better result reach their peak.

Furthermore, several teachings common in Young Adult fantasy narratives are as well present in *The Raven Boys* saga. As the plots develop, it is repeatedly stated that magic and its energy have specific rules the protagonists need to unveil in order to make progress and allow that magic to work. Among these rules there is the importance of reciprocity and sacrifice so as to obtain magic’s favour. As claimed in a previous section of this thesis, this constitutes a major topic in YA fantasy fiction, whose main moral lesson consists in making the readers understand and learn that magic, as everything valuable in life, always implies a cost and an effort to be made since it does not come for free. Indeed, the whole theme of making efforts and facing hardships in order to achieve something is also present in the difficulties encountered by the protagonists while they are in the magical forest, Cageswater. The entrance into this supernatural territory signals the protagonists’ process of growth: one from which they will exit older and wiser thanks to the trials and troubles they have to sort out while in there.

Finally, mention must be made of the fact that the saga also contains fictitious or pseudo-historical references that, while enriching plot interest and contributing to the imaginative atmosphere, are not supported by historical or archaeological evidence. For instance, in *The Raven Boys* (2012) there is an allusion to the “Madoc story”: the alleged Welsh landing in America before Christopher Columbus by Prince Madoc around 1170 (Carradice). Even though the claim remains unsupported in Stiefvater’s narrative, except for the allusion to a number of Welsh-influenced names, the story remains a Welsh literary legend in its own right: one which even interweaves traditional lore and history (i.e., Madoc’s purported father was the real 12<sup>th</sup>-century king Owain the Great

(Carradice)). Furthermore, although in the story it is stated that Iolo Goch was Glendower's close poet, there is no historical confirmation of this relationship apart from the poems written by Iolo Goch about the figure of Glyndwr. Besides, as can be seen throughout the narrative, the figure of Gwenllian is a major one in the story, even overshadowing Glendower's presence in it, which, as has been argued earlier, would appear to be at odds with factual evidence, as the historical information about this woman is scarce.

The present Master's Thesis, therefore, has demonstrated the centrality of Welsh history, culture, and mythology in *The Raven Boys* by tracing the main elements of the books' intertextual fabric in this regard. It goes without saying that in a fantasy narrative like this one historical truth, and even absolute accuracy in dealing with lore, myth and legend, are subordinate to fictional interest and the goals of the fantasy genre. The narrative manipulation or even the fabrication of these elements in the service of the latter (as in the case, for example, of Iolo Goch's closeness to Glyndwr, the relevance attached to Gwenllian's figure, or the peculiar allusions to Pre-Columbian trans-oceanic contact theories involving alleged Welsh sailors) is, after all, a perfectly legitimate fictional resource.

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