

Magic's Reflection of Religion in Garth Nix's Sabriel

Taymaa H. Kheirbek¹, Yousuf H. Ibrahim²

¹ Language and Culture Center, University of Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

² Department of English, College of Education and Natural Science, Charo University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT

Since the late nineteenth century, with the formalization of religious studies as an academic discipline, the notion of "magic" has assumed a pivotal role in delineating the outlines of religion. Eminent scholars in these fields have engaged in rigorous debates concerning the intricate interplay between magic and religion. Nevertheless, endeavors to establish precise distinctions between these domains have proven to be remarkably unpredictable, subject to persistent scrutiny and deconstruction. The concept of magic has obstinately retained its elusive and enigmatic character. This paper aims at analyzing Garth Nix's *Sabriel* as a contemporary work of fantasy, published in 1995. Nix's intention to incorporate religious elements into the novel was to reflect on the world people live in by including a coherent magical system. He was able to step beyond the novel's direct meaning to convey what his symbolic elements connote. In this paper, the main characteristics of high fantasy are presented and thoroughly explained. The magical system in the novel takes the spotlight with a descriptive and analytic approach tackling its significance and specifications with regards to the religious roots that it stems from. The religious elements including baptism, sacrifice, Dante's inferno and the gates of death, bells, and charter stones are also introduced with their defining qualifications compared to the elements in *Sabriel*.

KEYWORDS: High Fantasy, *Sabriel*, Young Adults literature, Magic, Religion

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1800s, when religious studies became a recognized academic discipline, the concept of "magic" has played a crucial role in shaping the understanding of religion. Though many significant scholars have discussed the relationship between magic and religion, previous efforts to articulate distinctions between these categories have proven to be infamously unstable, and vulnerable to recurrent critique. While the concept of magic has always been amorphous, religion has served as the primary rationale for human ambitions ranging from

conquests to social prestige for as long as history has been recorded.

Since 'faith' is the most important aspect of religion, the term was given the ability to influence lifestyle. This power was communicated in mythological stories that form worlds and magical systems (for example, stories in the Book of Genesis), which drew people even more to religion by strengthening faith through telling supernatural happenings and representing them via monks.

According to folklorists, every myth is a religious or "sacred" story (Campbell, 1949, p.25); however not all religious narratives can be classified as myths. Religious stories that describe the origins of the world and its creation are considered myths, whereas some religious narratives focus on aspects other than explaining how things came to exist in their present state. For example, hagiographies of famous saints are not myths. High fantasy stories, like those represented in religious

Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (KUJHSS), Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023.

Received 17 Sept 2023; Accepted 17 Oct 2023,

Regular research paper: Published 30 Nov 2023

Corresponding author's e-mail: jordut48ut@gmail.com & taymahusseinali@gmail.com Copyright ©2023. Taymaa H.

Kheirbek, Yousuf H. Ibrahim, this is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.



writings, took inspiration from the force of religion to create a universe that governs the characters' lives and a system that they must follow in order to grow. This inspiration is reflected as a secondary world, as well as magical systems that can be anchored in the remarkable powers found in religious myths. This paper attempts to explain the exceptional vitality of scholarly discourse of magic and the portrayal of religion in Garth Nix's *Sabriel* trilogy. The purpose is to examine *Sabriel*, the first book in *The Old Kingdom* series, which is based on *Sabriel's* journey as she inherits her destiny as *Abhorsen*, the destroyer of the Dead. The magical system in *Sabriel* will be the focus of this paper, with a descriptive and analytic approach addressing its biblical sources and connections.

1. Fantasy

Fantasy (also referred to as Fantastic) first appeared as a unique literary genre when realism as a new mode acquired high recognition during the eighteenth century. Therefore, the fantastic mode has been used in the majority of Western fiction, novel in specific (Mathews, 2002, p. 2). Tzvetan Todorov, a French literary critic, made the pioneering effort to define the fantastic genre arguing that the fantastic emerges when a reader is in a state of indecision, unable to choose between a natural or supernatural explanation for a mysterious event. According to his theory, the fantastic genre exists within this period of uncertainty (1980, p.25). When the enigmatic event is eventually explained, it transforms into either the uncanny or the marvelous, depending on the new laws of nature that need to be considered to make sense of the phenomenon (1980, p.41).

In general, fantasy includes several subgenres including Arthurian fantasy, sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, and comic fantasy. Like other subgenres, they can be seen as fluid entities; as tastes change. Some subgenres fade away, while others arise as new and hybrid ones. High fantasy, however, is considered a separate subgenre of fantasy which became commercially available in 1977 after the great success of *The Lord of the Rings* which was written by Tolkien (Clute and Grant, 1999, p.381). High fantasy, as it is known now, can be defined as the antithesis of Literature (Glender, 2004, p.11). As a result, being a best-selling book rather refers to a genre of writing with motivations, logics, and practices distinct from literary fiction. Literary fiction, on the other hand, is uncertain at best about its industrial

bonds and likes to perceive itself as anything more than a genre including amusement (Gelder, 2004, p.1).

Secondary worlds are considered essential in high fantasy since they are ideal for diving into major human issues. These modern secondary worlds, such as in Herbert's *Dune* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *Middle-earth*, are considered complex, since they tend to have a diverse and broad cast of characters and creatures. In addition, the strong, historical, legendary and spiritual background illustrate the breadth and diversity of ways in which the world can be explored through Secondary worlds. This development of the environment sheds light on extremely effective attention on certain issues of considerable concern (Tolkien, 2008, p.412). Secondary worlds can be used to examine multiple concepts and ideas (religious, philosophical, psychological, or political) in a unique fashion.

Tolkien believes that secondary worlds signify a particular aspect of fantasy's comeback to the inexpressible, illogical, and ridiculous. It is interesting to know that when the realistic novel's ordinary world becomes insufficient for investigating and expressing the complexity of human existence, fantasy appears to take over (2008, p.29). Lessing, a British novelist, also states that novelists are attempting to breaking the rules of the realistic novel because of the fast change that humans witness every day. The fantastic and the incredible are no more denoting exaggeration (1978)

Tolkien invented the phrase "Secondary World" in his essay "On Fairy-stories" as an attempt to convey a clear image of a fantasy world that exists independently of the real "Primary" world but is presented with a certain degree of realism (Tolkien, 2008, p.43-49). He also states:

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So, upon logic was founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll. (1936, p.144)

Secondary worlds are self-contained, including some kind of inner consistency of reality as well as rules and logic that cannot be considered as arbitrary or unreliable (Tolkien, 2008, p.51). In their 1999 work, Clute and Grant distinguish between two concepts: "Secondary Worlds" and "Fantasylands." A "Secondary World" traditionally plays a significant role in the story, and there's a continuous and meaningful relationship between the setting and the narrative. In this type of world, they both

rely on each other and influence each other. On the other hand, a "Fantasyland" is a simpler imagining of a world. High Fantasy often involves multiple protagonists, although there's usually one central character of utmost importance. Additionally, it often features multiple intertwined narratives that collectively build a primary story centered around a significant threat to the Secondary World. In high fantasy, the fate of this Secondary World typically serves as the core and unifying thread that connects all the other story elements. This style of fantasy is described as "high in scope" because it deals with the destiny of an entire world and "high in scale" because it requires an extensive narrative to convey its complex storyline.

Garth Nix's *Sabriel* is categorized as a fantasy novel, followed by *Lirael*, *Abhorsen*, *Clariel*, and *Goldenhand*. The story revolves around *Sabriel*, an *abhorsen*. The title of the novel, which is also the name of the main character, could be derived from the frequently given Hebrew name; *Sabra*, which is thought to represent a prickly exterior with a warm heart. Adding the *-el* connotation would turn the name into something like 'God's cactus' *Devonelisa*. The novel, which follows her journey through *The Old Kingdom*, is about her overcoming dangerous obstacles to maintain the proper boundaries between life and death (Campbell, 2009, p.1).

Sabriel's power as a fantasy novel comes from its deconstruction of a common quest story structure: the line of division between the worlds of the dead and the living. Nix's decision to feature a female protagonist in a quest narrative may suggest that he is challenging or altering the traditional gender patterns often seen in hero quests, as discussed and critiqued by Hourihan in "Deconstructing the Hero." In the case of *Sabriel*, she is portrayed as her father's daughter and heir, with a clear destiny to follow in his footsteps as the next *Abhorsen*, a practitioner of benevolent necromancy and preserve the right boundaries between life and death. *Sabriel* reverses the traditional roles of man and woman in fairy tale quests when she kisses a prince awake from suspended animation, however, her skills are not sufficient enough to surmount the returning dead, therefore, it is her father who rescues her and saves the world. As a result, Nix's work reaffirms 'the concept of women's inherently ancillary role' (1997, p.174). This leads the readers of the novel to see the protagonist's attempts to surmount the challenges from a different perspective.

The unique magical concepts in *Sabriel* attract any reader for its depth, practicality, meaning, and impact on the flow of the story; as the elements have a specific interconnected effect on the decisions made by characters, as well as the structure of the world and story. Nonetheless, the influence of religious elements, especially Christianity's do appear on the magical system of the world, making the story much more interesting to explore. Among the most important elements found in the book and provide the similarities they hold with other elements from religion are baptism, sacrifice, Dante's *Inferno* and the gates of death, bells, and charter stones.

2. Main Religious Elements

2.1 Baptism

The English word 'baptize' is derived from the Greek term 'baptizein', which originally meant to dip, immerse, or wash. In the context of the first century, this term was also used in relation to merchants who would 'baptize' cloth in large dye vats. The process involved immersing the cloth into the vat, causing it to undergo a transformation by absorbing the dye into its fibers. Consequently, the cloth, which had previously been white, would now become red, as it had assimilated the characteristics of the dye. Similarly, people were 'baptized' in fear or anger, fully 'baptized' in fear or anger, fully absorbing these emotions, leading to a believed change of behavior. (Scobie, 1964, p. 92). Moreover, Jews practiced baptism before and after the New Testament, and certain sects baptized Gentile converts seeking to change their identity for the better, leaving their old ways behind, and embracing the teaching of their God. The act of baptism signified a transformative shift, making them feel entirely 'new' (Torrance, 1954, p.150-152). The New Testament utilized baptismal language to express their spiritual message: becoming a Christian means being placed into 'the body of Christ', experiencing a radical change from sinner to saint, from spiritual death to being 'made alive with Christ.' The Apostle Paul highlights the transformative power of Christ: 'As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved' in his letter to the Ephesians (The Bible, Eph 2:1,5). Colossians also mentions the joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified his holy people with light in his kingdom (The Bible, Col 1:12,13). It is affirmed that

only believers are rescued and become a new creation in Christ.

In the prologue of *Sabriel*, The Old Kingdom witnesses the birth of a child amid travelers. She nearly dies instantly, forcing her father, the Abhorsen, to traverse Death to retrieve her. The Abhorsen announces her return and gives her the name Sabriel when she is taken back and baptized with a charter mark. Baptism in The Old Kingdom series is the process of blessing a person, usually done at birth, with a charter mark upon their brow. This mark takes the form of an ash-colored charter mark on the forehead of the mage, and gives them the ability to see, sense, and use Charter Magic. Not only that the charter mark of baptism can be used as a common security practice among Charter Mages, it allows them to ensure the authenticity of a person's mark for purity. Furthermore, the absence of the Charter Mark indicates a person corrupted by free magic. When Sabriel crosses the border into the Old Kingdom, Colonel Horyse, who is in charge of the border garrison, checks her out. When Sabriel touches the mark, she experiences a recognizable energy swirl and the sensation of plunging into an unending galaxy of stars (Nix, 2006, p.35).

In parallel with the sacramental rites of Christianity, wherein the sanctity of baptism is conveyed through the use of holy water, the author of *Sabriel* uses a similar approach. From the beginning of the novel, the Charter mage who performed Sabriel's baptism carefully retrieved a diminutive vial from his pouch. With great reverence, he raised it high into the air, all the while chanting sacred words that would bestow blessings upon the liquid it held. The liquid within the vial seemed to respond, pulsing in harmony with the rhythmic cadence of the chant. With a deliberate touch to the earth, the mage then moved the vial over the child, causing the radiant liquid to gracefully cascade and anoint the child's forehead, and the priest cried: "By the Charter that binds all things, we name thee—" (Nix, 2006, p.9-10). As soon as the Abhorsen uttered the name "Sabriel," the wood ash adornment on the priest's brow started to disappear and gradually formed on the children. The baptism was approved by the Charter. In "Sabriel," baptism through the bestowal of the ash-colored charter mark mirrors the transformative ritual of Baptism in Christianity. This process symbolizes entry into the realm of Charter Magic, akin to the spiritual rebirth and purity associated with Christian baptism. The parallel underscores the characters' spiritual transformation and their access to

divine forces, highlighting the profound connection between the two traditions.

The charter marks, emblematic of virtue and divinity, were created by the seven entities known as the bright shiners. As symbols of cosmic authority, these marks emanate and transmit their power unto those deemed deserving, granting recipients access forces of the divine. "Sabriel brought the Charter marks of opening to the forefront of her mind. The marks grew, power flowing round and round the ring, growing in force till it started to project inwards... A golden light began to stream about the sarcophagus, visible streaks rotating clockwise around it, with greater and greater speed." (Nix, 2006, p.350). Like Christian baptism, the charter marks bestow sanctity, spiritual rebirth, and entry into the 'kingdom of light.' While the definition of baptism in the Bible is "a rite of washing with water as a sign of religious purification and consecration." As stated in the verse, "Charter marks serve as evidence of purity and the blessings of the Charter in the Old Kingdom.

2.2 Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a nuanced occurrence that has been observed in the earliest known forms of worship all around the world. An object is sacrificed to divinity as part of a religious process known as sacrifice in order to establish, preserve, or restore a human being's proper relationship to the divine order (Faherty, 2021). In situations where the options for survival are severely constrained, the deliberate act of sacrifice assumes preference as a measure to avert the potential loss of a multitude of lives. Within the context of Christian theology, sacrifice constitutes a religious observance intended to venerate the Divine by means of offering objects, including animals or cereals, as a token of homage. Depending on the underlying intent, practitioners of Christianity engage in various forms of sacrificial practices, such as cereal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, communion offerings, and burnt offerings. The genesis of the sacrificial system traces back to the advent of sin, wherein culpability was symbolically transferred from the offending individual to an immaculate lamb or other sacrificial animal. This ritualistic paradigm poignantly echoes the profound significance of Christ's self-immolation on behalf of humanity, exemplifying the epitome of redemptive sacrifice. These sacrifices continued to be practiced even in the time of Jesus, until it ceased and was replaced with

prayer and praise cults (Ashby, 1970). According to theologian Frances Young, the church began to spiritualize sacrifice around AD 70, rejecting the physical practice of sacrifices on the grounds that Christ's death was viewed as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice, annulling all other sacrifices (1975). Thus, the above indicates that after the crucifixion of Jesus the church abstained from ritual sacrifices and instead used a spiritual language.

In Sabriel, the theme of sacrifice is portrayed through the Five Charters, as seven of them decided to sacrifice themselves, seeking to use their strength to create life independently capable of existing on its own. They are identified by a song:

**Five great Charter knit the land
Together linked, hand in hand**

One for the people who wear the crown

Two in the folk who keep the Dead down

Three and five became stone and mortar

Four sees all in the frozen water.

(Nix, Sabriel, 2006, p.232)

This verse, frequently chanted by young scholars in the Old Kingdom, illuminates the intricate distribution of power within the Charter. Among the Seven bright shiners, five displayed unyielding dedication, relinquishing their corporeal existence and conscious awareness, opting to bind their essence within five distinct bloodlines. The first went into the Royal Bloodline, the second into the Abhorsens, the third and the fifth bound into the Wall, Great Charter Stones and the Wallmakers, whilst the fourth was bound into the Clayr line. Thus, five of the bright shiners fully sacrificed themselves, while two of them partially did.

The novel showcases the indispensability of the Great Charter's sacrifice for the characters' survival. 'The great charters are the keystones of the Charter. The Bloodlines, the Wall, and the Charter Stones, all come from the original sacrifice of the Five, who poured their power into the men and woman who were your ancestors. Some of those, in turn, passed that power to stone and mortar...' (Nix, 2003, p. 461). The Seven Bright Shiners, driven by their noble purpose to safeguard the Old Kingdom, embarked on a momentous act of sacrifice, channeling the formidable Free magic present within the realm to create the sacred charter (Nix, 2014). The aim was to save the Old Kingdom from the power of the destroyer, Orannis, one of the two of the bright shiners who refused to sacrifice themselves. He is the ninth Bright Shiner and the

most powerful entity of all time. Even his name carries Free magic and evil.

Considering these notions, a deeper comprehension emerges regarding The Seven Bright Shiners' purpose in thwarting Orannis. In their ultimate endeavor to avert the annihilation of the world, the Seven unitedly bound the malevolent entity Orannis. During his final attempt at destroying the world, the Seven finally banded together and bound it. With the strongest of the Nine cast away, their spirits occupy all the bells and panpipes in existence, which must number in the hundreds, implying that the power of their sacrifice is distributed throughout the universe. When compared to the complex concept of sacrifice wherein one individual may perceive their act of sacrifice as an epitome of glory, while another may rightfully interpret it as relinquishing to a mightier suitor. This complexity arises from the multifaceted relationship between sacrifice and the individual, wherein "sacrificing oneself" aligns with the former, and "being sacrificed" epitomizes the latter. This dynamic is further complicated during times of crisis and conflict where the "necessity" of sacrifice is often embraced as an idea that will contribute to a worthy cause of resolution (Griffin, 2007, p.9). Similarly, within the novel, it becomes clear that the Great Charter's sacrifice is essential for the characters to survive. Therefore, the crucifixion of Jesus is parallel to the sacrifice of the Great Charters.

2.3 Dante's Inferno and the Gates of Death

Dante's Inferno and Nix's Sabriel share similarities in their portrayal of the gates of death. Both works feature punished characters, interactions with otherworldly beings, repeating characters, and the misery within the gates. However, differences exist in the nature of interactions, reasons for protagonists' visits beyond the gates, and how the gates operate (Hawkins, 2005, p.1-19). Dante's Inferno is an Italian narrative poem detailing the author's journey through hell and its organized punishments, while Sabriel is a fantasy novel centered on Sabriel's battle against evil.

Inferno is the initial segment of Dante Alighieri's 14th-century epic poem Divine Comedy. It depicts Dante's harrowing voyage into Hell under the guidance of the ancient Roman poet Virgil and comes after Purgatorio and Paradiso (Griffiths and Reynolds, 2006). When passing through the nine circles of hell, Dante beholds the sinners' punishments, with each circle corresponding to the gravity of their transgressions. The infernal realm is

structured hierarchically, with minor offenses penalized near the surface and major sins consigned to the abyssal depths. Despite being a Roman Catholic like many of his contemporaries in the 1300s, Dante's vision of Hell mirrors his personal values rather than those endorsed by the church (Gardner, 1908).

In the nine circles of Hell, Dante is led by Virgil, representing an increasing degree of wickedness, with the devil chained at the center of the earth. Each sinner receives eternal punishment corresponding to their chief sin committed. In *The Old Kingdom* series, especially in *Sabriel*, the Nine Gates of Death bear resemblance to Dante's gates of hell. The protagonist, Sabriel, ventures through these gates to complete tasks and save her father. The Nine Gates of Death are described as a cold river stretching endlessly in both directions, dividing death into nine precincts, each separated by gates.

The further one ventures into the gates of death: the stronger and more powerful beings emerge. The main villain, Kerrigor, initially emerges from the final gate in *Sabriel*. The book hints that beyond the ninth gate lies a place of absolute death from which no being can return. These parallels suggest that Garth Nix might have drawn inspiration from medieval interpretations of hell, particularly Dante's *Inferno*, given its significance from that era.

2.4 Bells

In Christian tradition, bells hold significant associations with churches and religious practices. Since the fifth century, certain Christian churches have utilized bells for both spiritual and practical purposes, including summoning the faithful to worship, marking specific stages of church services, and reminding believers of God's omnipresence in their daily lives. The resonating tones and rhythmic patterns of church bells evoke emotions of joy, warning, or sorrow, fostering communal participation in shared experiences of rejoicing and mourning (Wellman, 2016). Furthermore, a prevalent belief among some Christians suggests that the ringing of church bells can dispel malevolent forces, particularly demons. *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, authored by Durand and Duranti, explores the origin and significance of religious practices and explains that when storms approach, the tolling of bells frightens demons, prompting them to flee upon hearing the divine trumpet of the Eternal King, thus ceasing the storm. Notably, bells

were consecrated through baptism and blessings (2007, p.69).

Similarly, in *Sabriel*, a work parallel to Christian beliefs from the 15th century, seven bells hold prominence, each named after one of the Seven who created the Charter. Employed by necromancers, these Seven bells serve to summon and control the Dead. While Free Magic sorcerers are the primary wielders of these bells, the Abhorsen family boasts the most skilled bell-wielders. Distinguished by their silver hue and adorned with Charter markings on both wood and metal, the Abhorsen's bells exude a sense of dark, deeply polished mahogany in their handles. In contrast, other necromancers' bells are typically crafted from bronze or silver, featuring darker wood handles, often ebony. These bells possess the distinct scent of hot-metal indicative of Free Magic, and notably, they lack Charter marks.

Seven bells, carried on a leather bandolier that resembles a weathered brown belt, are individually housed in leather pouches of different sizes. The largest pouch holds the seventh bell. While it is suggested that ringing each bell summons the power of the Seven Bright Shiners who formed the Charter, this connection is not explicitly stated in the series. These bells have the ability to bind or raise the dead and are utilized by both Abhorsens and Necromancers. However, it is crucial that the wielder is properly trained, as the *Book of the Dead* warns of unintended and dangerous consequences when using most of the bells without adequate training (Nix, *Sabriel* 2006, p.65).

In the novel, the bells hold significant importance for Abhorsens and Necromancers. Few people have encountered necromancers, but those who have remember the significance of the bells and Abhorsen's sword (Nix, *Sabriel* 2006, p.37). The story explains how the bells are made and quenched in the water of the precincts between the Nine Gates of Death, resembling the Christian practice of baptizing bells for consecration ("*The Nine Gates of Death*," 2016).

2.5 Charter Stones

Charter Stones trace their origins to ancient times when they were granted to individuals or towns as symbolic tokens of land grants from monarchs, feudal overlords, or other esteemed figures, serving as records of land ownership in an era before widespread written documentation (Scott, 1900). In the realm of *Sabriel*, these Charter Stones take the form of magnificent stone

monuments adorned with ever-shifting Charter marks, an eternal narrative depicting the creation of the world (Nix, 2006, p.28). Possessing an intrinsic connection to the Charter magic, they bestow Charter mages with seamless access to their mystical powers, granting them the means to quell the forces of the Dead and bar entry to the realm of Death itself. Regrettably, these sacred stones can be obliterated by Free Magic sorcerers, employing the blood of a Charter mage to shatter the stones and unleash chaos upon the world.

Historically, Charter Magic played a pivotal role in establishing order within the Old Kingdom, enabling the virtuous utilization of magic for the greater good. Scattered throughout the Old Kingdom, the numerous Charter Stones serve to fortify the influence of the Charter and concurrently weaken the malevolent forces of Free Magic.

In the grand tapestry of magical forces, Charter magic epitomizes benevolence while Free magic embodies malevolence. The absence of Charter Stones serves as an unhindered conduit for the proliferation of Free Magic, granting it a menacing ascendancy. Kerrigor, a formidable Necromancer and adept Free Magic sorcerer, steadily amplifies his strength by sapping the life force of the living and exploiting the shattered Charter Stones, thus obliterating even the most resilient defenses erected by Charter Magic (Nix, 2006, p.279). Motivated to push the boundaries of Free magic's potency, Kerrigor resolves to annihilate the Charter Stones, thereby weakening the Charter and further augmenting his arcane dominion.

Kerrigor had plans to destroy the Great Charter stones so that he could summon a massive host of Dead through the permanent gate that the broken stones would have created. Touchstones retell one of Kerrigor's earliest successful attempts at breaking two of the great charter stones:

"There was terrible wrong down there, but it was Rogirek's doing, not his discovery. There are six Great Stones and two were just being broken, broken with the blood of his sisters, sacrificed by his Free Magic minions as we approached. I remember Rogirek, stepping up behind the Queen, I saw-edged dagger striking so swiftly across her throat. He had a cup, a golden cup, one of the Queen's own, to catch the blood..." (Nix, 2006, p.227)

Kerrigor's aspiration to resurrect the deceased nudges back to the ancient and pervasive practice of necromancy, which has been ingrained in human history since time immemorial. Death, a profound and sorrowful event that

profoundly impacted communities, led humans to contemplate ways of communing with the departed as their beliefs in the afterlife and underworld grew increasingly intricate. A wide variety of rituals developed over time in an effort to make contact with the dead and resurrect them (Kapcar, 2015, p.1). Consequently, the practice of necromancy emerged as a means to communicate with the departed, gain insights, and even wield influence.

Necromancy is a purported form of magic that involves contacting the deceased, either by summoning their spirits or physically raising their bodies for purposes such as divination, subjugation, or acquiring knowledge of future events (Bremmer, 2015, p.7). This art is often practiced through veneration of deities, use of altars, or employing elements from graveyards (Barber, 1988, p.4). Since it is associated with the divine act of resurrection, it inherently challenges religious beliefs. Mortals evoking the dead to their will can be perceived as an act of defiance against the divine and submission to malevolent forces. Thus, it is regarded with disdain by most religions, including Christianity. The Bible explicitly condemns and denounces necromancy, deeming attempts to communicate with the deceased as wrongful. Seeking counsel from necromancers is strictly forbidden as an abomination to God, to be shunned like any other form of evil.

These Christian sentiments are delicately woven into the fabric of Sabriel, where a world filled with magic hosts not only benevolent practices but also the malevolent. Necromancers like Kerrigor wield the power to control the deceased, rendering them feared adversaries and adversaries of the Abhorsen. Similar to real-life practitioners, necromancers in Sabriel employ unrestrained necromantic bells to amplify their magical abilities and become more formidable foes (Nix, 2006, p.397). However, their pursuits are not merely rooted in acquiring power. Ultimately, the genesis of necromancy lies in the inevitability of death, wherein influence and strength wane with age (Kapcar, 2015, p.1). Thus, necromancers dread mortality and are driven to prolong their existence by any means possible. This is exemplified in the novel when a necromancer named Chlorr anchors her physical form to prevent "the True Death" and secure perpetual rebirth (Nix, 2006, p.397). Despite the different modes of practice, striking parallels exist between the necromancers in Christianity and those depicted in the novel. Both strive for extended youth and the mastery of

incomprehensible powers, with one employing necromantic bells and the other utilizing various tools to achieve successful channeling rituals.

In addition to necromancers, one can reasonably posit that the charter stones and their inscriptions bear a striking resemblance to Churches and the Cross. Similar to charter stones, both Churches and the Cross serve as bastions against malevolence by representing goodness and divinity. Churches, being deemed sacred, render creatures like vampires unable to enter them, as they symbolize evil's exclusion from sacred spaces (Barber, 1988, p.9). Interestingly, vampires hold a paradoxical allure due to their resemblance to a negative Christ figure. While Jesus shed his blood to save humanity, vampires, in contrast, extract blood to bring about destruction (Eldrige, 2014). Various vampire myths revolve around the transformation of a king or nobleman into evil, such as the infamous Vlad Dracula, whose name is a reversal of the image of the king of kings who vanquishes evil. Notably, the vampire lore is uniquely intertwined with religious elements. The crucifix and sanctified holy water were initially believed to repel vampires before popular media embraced the vampire theme. Vampires were strictly prohibited from entering churches or consecrated grounds, and the only known method of slaying them involved dismembering and burning their remains to prevent reconstitution (Eldrige, 2014). The striking resemblance between charter stones and Churches, with their protective inscriptions, is noteworthy. Both repel malevolence, and Churches exclude vampires due to their sanctity (Barber, 1988, p.9). Vampires embody a perverted reflection of Christ, using blood for destruction rather than salvation (Eldrige, 2014). This intertwining of vampire lore with religious motifs underscores the enduring fascination with the supernatural and the relevance of ancient symbolism in the novel.

Thus, diverse methods have been presumed to provide protection against demonic forces, Satan, or ill omens. Authentic Christians staunchly adhere to such means, evident in their use of bells and the Cross (Guzman, 2013). While false methods like salt have been propagated, the Cross remains the most reliable, for it is believed that evil holds no dominion over those clothed in the righteousness of Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem's admonition to Christians further bolsters these notions, encouraging the open display of the Cross to repel malevolent forces (Guzman, 2013). Consequently, it is plausible to assert that the methods employed by the

characters in Sabriel to fend off necromancers align with real-life practices used by Christians. This is exemplified in the revered charter stones wielded by Abhorsens, serving as sacred instruments capable of safeguarding their users from necromancers and free magic alike (Nix, 2006, p.158). Kerrigor's attempt to destroy these stones echoes his Dracula-like fear of the Cross hindering his powers and machinations.

Moreover, the parallels between the charter stones and the Cross extend to their effects on the main antagonist, Kerrigor. Both are weakened in the presence of divine powers and grow stronger when those powers are diminished. Kerrigor's strength increases as the charter stones are shattered, akin to Dracula's vulnerability in the absence of the Cross (Nix, 2006, p.278). Additionally, like Dracula's invincibility until his body is consumed by fire, Kerrigor's existence remains preserved by Free Magic, making him virtually immortal until his hidden body is discovered (Nix, 2006, p.276-277). Hence, the methods employed in Sabriel to repel necromancers resonate with real-life Christian practices, as evidenced by their similarity in application and purpose. Thus, the striking similarity between the charter stones and the Cross lies in their shared purpose of repelling evil forces. Just as the Cross is believed to ward off demons and devils in Christian lore, the charter stones serve as a means to keep the main antagonist at bay in the novel, illustrating a profound thematic connection between the supernatural protections in both contexts.

Conclusion

Within the multitude of literary genres, fantasy literature often possesses specific characteristics that render it susceptible to religious interpretations and responses. This susceptibility arises from its customary content, which includes elements like supernatural events, superhuman actions, beings, and fantastical settings. The modern fantasy genre shares similarities with religious narrative, such as myths, tales of wonders, and epic literature, in terms of these trans-empirical or superhuman aspects. Fantasy fiction and religious stories have a lot in common when it comes to world creation in which it has an implicit anthropology and cosmology as part of its underlying world model.

Religion became a foundation from which many writers drew inspiration to create their worlds and magical systems, including Garth Nix. He did not simply

create a secondary world; rather, he intentionally incorporated religious elements into the novel to reflect on our world. By achieving this, he succeeded to go beyond the novel's direct meaning to the limits of the representations and significance of the symbolisms that can be found within these elements. Thus, it can be considered a well-known fantasy fiction that makes significant contributions in the field of religion while maintaining diverse and open-ended main portrayals of religion and magic.

Additionally, when the afterlife is depicted through its narrative, the novel encourages readers to contemplate the notion that the current reality represents only a portion of what reality encompasses. In doing so, it brings attention to key themes within religious discussions and provides a platform for contemplating concepts like religion, magic, and the nature of reality. Furthermore, it fosters a dual perspective, prompting reflection on both everyday existence and the realm beyond, thereby blurring the certainty surrounding the status of these realities. Ultimately, in Sabrial, representations drawn from religion can be clearly studied and shown. Similarities to contemporary concepts of spirituality and magic have been suggested, in addition to many implicit references to popular mythologies. The book has numerous literary parallels with religious narratives which present intentional and teleological story worlds. All this has been done by attracting readers' interest to magic, myth, and religion via mystery, fascination, and curiosity.

The genius of Garth Nix lies behind his use of aesthetical bond to the real-world religious concepts. This technique enabled the work to be easily understood on a plot level and figurative level, which would, in turn, enable the text to remain interesting, fresh, and unique alongside its everlasting religious concepts of our world. Hence, he succeeded in reflecting the real-world concepts in his story and reached meanings beyond the extension of storytelling.

References

- Ashby, G. (1970), "Sacrifice: Its Nature and Purpose: Semantic Scholar", *Undefined*.
- Barber, P. (1988). *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality*. N.Y.: Yale University Press.
- Bremmer, N. (2015), "Ancient Necromancy: Fact or Fiction?" *Academia.edu*.
- https://www.academia.edu/25862003/Ancient_Necromancy_Fact_or_Fiction [Accessed 12 May 2022]
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Pantheon.
- Campbell, M. (2009). "Sabriel." *Behind the Name - the Etymology and History of First Names*. www.behindthename.com/name/sabriel/submitted#:~:text=Lastly%2C%20it%20could%20also%20have%20been%20derived%20from,important%20protagonist%20in%20the%20sequels%20%27Lirael%27%20and%20%27Abhorsen%27. [Accessed on 5 May 2022]
- Clute, J. and Grant, J. (1999). *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. London: Orbit, pp.337-390. Print.
- Durand, G. and Duranti, W. (2007). *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum: The Foundational Symbolism of the Early Church, Its Structure, Decoration, Sacraments and Vestments, Books I, III and IV*. Paul & Company Pub Consortium. <https://books.google.iq/books?id=J6wVAQAAIAAJ>
- Eldrige, A. (2014), "Vampire." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. www.britannica.com/topic/vampire. [Accessed 5 June 2022]
- Faherty, L. (2021), "sacrifice". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sacrifice-religion>. [Accessed 21 November 2021]
- Gardner, E. (1908), "Dante Alighieri." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04628a.htm>. [Accessed 21 Nov. 2021]
- Gelder, K. (2004). *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. Oxon: Routledge. Print.
- Griffin, R. (2007). *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Griffiths, E. and Reynolds. M. (2006) "Dante in English." *Translation and Literature*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 115-122., doi:10.3366/tal.2006.0011.
- Guzman, S. (2013), "Spiritual Weapons: The Sign of the Cross." *The Catholic Gentleman*. catholicgentleman.com/2013/10/spiritual-weapons-the-sign-of-the-cross/.
- Hawkins, S. (2005), "The Poets' Dante, the Vision of Dante: Cary's Translation of 'The Divine Comedy.'" *Translation and Literature*, vol. 14, no.1, pp. 1-104.
- Hourihan, M. (1997). *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. London: Routledge.

- Kapcar, A. (2015). "The Origins of Necromancy or How We Learned to Speak to the Dead." In: *Journal of Occult Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 30-58.
- Lessing, D. (1978). "Some Remarks." In: *The Doris Lessing Reader*. London: Jonathan Cape, pp. 100-120.
- Mathews, R. (2002). *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. New York: Routledge.
- Nix, G. (2014). "An Essay on Free Magic: A Manuscript Fragment from the Great Library of the Clayr". http://oldkingdom.com.au/extras_freemagic.html [Accessed 20 Sep. 2022]
- Nix, G. (2003). *Lirael - Book 2 - Old Kingdom Trilogy*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Nix, G. (2006). *Sabriel*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Scobie, C. (1964). *John the Baptist*. SCM cheap edition. London: SCM Press. <https://books.google.iq/books?id=T9zYAAAAMAAJ> [Accessed 23 July 2022]
- Scott, W. (1900). *The Complete Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company. <http://www.loc.gov/item/00004232/> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2022].
- The Bible* (1979). Authorized King James version, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
- "The Nine Gates of Death", (2016) Oldkingdom.Com. Au, http://oldkingdom.com.au/extras_ninegates.html#top. [Accessed 24 August 2022]
- Todorov, T. (1980). *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca, New York: "Cornell UP."
- Tolkien, J.R.R. (2008), "On Fairy Stories". Tolkien on Fairy-Stories: Expanded Edition, with Commentary and Notes. Eds. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. London: HarperCollins, pp. 27-84.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. "The Monsters and the Critics." Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. 22, 1936, pp. 245-295.
- Torrance, T. F. (1954), "Proselyte Baptism." *New Testament Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 150-154., doi:10.1017/S0028688500003696.
- Wellman, J. (2016). "Why Do Churches Have Bells?". *Christian Crier*. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2016/10/28/why-do-churches-have-bells/>
- Young, F. M. (1978). *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ*. London: SPCK.