

Glendower and the Otherworld: Celticism in *The Raven Cycle*

BA Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This essay strives to describe the connection between the 19<sup>th</sup> century movement of the Celtic Twilight and the modern day young adult series *The Raven Cycle*. The Celtic Twilight influenced the way that the Celts are seen. *The Raven Cycle* shows a strong connection to Celtic literature and is influenced by certain aspects of Celticism, most clearly shown in the connection between nature and magic. Throughout the series magic is connected to nature, and strongest in places where there is an emphasis on nature. This is most visible in the Otherworld, Cabeswater, a magical forest where the characters are more in touch with nature and magic. The main characters learn to develop their magic with the help of the Otherworld. This leads to the main characters forming a stronger bond with each other, but with this bond they become more distant from reality and other people.

## Introduction

Many pieces of young adult fiction draw inspiration from established works. Novels such as *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* are based on Greek mythology and *New Moon*, the second book of the *Twilight Saga* clearly shows inspiration by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Some young adult and children's novels use Celtic myths and legends as inspiration, in particular the legend of King Arthur (Filmer 108). One example of the use of Arthuriana in modern-day children's books is the *Harry Potter* series. Alessandra Petrina discusses the use of Arthurian spaces in the series and Heather Arden and Kathryn Lorenz also discuss the connection between *Harry Potter* and Arthuriana. Another series that incorporates Celtic elements is Maggie Stiefvater's *The Raven Cycle*. This is a young adult fiction series consisting of *The Raven Boys* (2012), *The Dream Thieves* (2013), *Blue Lily, Lily Blue* (2014) and *The Raven King* (2016). In the series a group of four boys (Gansey, Ronan, Adam and Noah) and one girl (Blue) go on a quest, looking for the Welsh king Glendower. Glendower is the anglicised name of Owain Glyndŵr who was a Welsh ruler around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. After his death he became a part of Welsh mythology, as a hero who would come and redeem the country (Henken 1-2).

The novels draw on the history and themes found in Celtic literature such as magic, kingship and the Otherworld. Tales like *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, medieval Welsh prose, are about kings and magic. The Otherworld can often be found in Irish literature, such as in the myth of Oisín in Tír na nÓg. W. B. Yeats adapted the myth into a poem, "The Wanderings of Oisín." Yeats is seen as a prominent writer during the Celtic Twilight. This was a literary movement that was strongly influenced by the political times, the struggle for Irish independence during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The literature during this period is inspired by Celtic literature. One example of this is Yeats' play *The Death of Cúchulainn*. In most of Yeats' work the term Celtic is connected to the notions of nature and magic. He

quotes Ernest Renan's *The Poetry of the Celtic Races*, where Renan discusses the connection between the Celts and their love of nature, their strong imagination and the magic that can be found in nature ("The Celtic Element in Literature" 270). These elements are referred to as "Celtic characteristics" (271). These characteristics are also discussed by Mathew Arnold, another author during the Celtic Twilight. He discusses how the Celtic love for nature is not because of the beauty of nature, but of the sentiment (84). Yeats takes these comments and puts them in the broader context of the world, "the ancient worship of nature" (275). There is a passion and love for nature that cannot be seen in the more modern view of nature (278-9). Francis Shaw criticises Yeats' view of the Celts. The "dreamy" way that is used to describe the Celts, he argues, is indeed often used in the literature that is part of the Celtic twilight, but it is not a part of Irish literature (260). He states that Yeats is too idealistic and "the strongest grade of rose-tinted glasses must be used if we would see the world of ancient Irish saga as Mr. Yeats wishes us to see it" (263). He states that Irish literature is not all myths and dreams but filled with action and life (267).

While the Celtic Twilight is long over, this does not mean that its influence cannot still be seen today. Celtic elements can sometimes be used as a gimmick, the portrayal of druids, magic and other elements seen as Celtic. The portrayal of Celtic tales is more often based on popular images than on the actual tales. The sense of mystery and magic found in nature that is prominent during the Celtic Twilight is also a prominent aspect in Maggie Stiefvater's *The Raven Cycle*, along with other elements connected to Celtic literature such as otherness and the Otherworld.

The narrative in *The Raven Cycle* is very character driven and aside from the quest there is much focus on the characters, their dynamic and their development (Dumančić and Oklopčić 41-2). The books can be seen as part of the Urban Fantasy genre and as such are influenced by older myths and legends (41). One aspect of this is the concept of the

Otherworld. Also, the group dynamic in *The Raven Cycle* is reminiscent of Arthur and his knights, with Gansey being compared to a king and strongly connected to Glendower. Gansey's love for his friends is unconditional and he is the leader of the group (47-8). The changing perspectives are a strong influence on how the characters are seen. It allows the reader to see the characters through the eyes of the different characters and their image of themselves. In the case of Blue, her perspective emphasises the sense of otherness she experiences (43). The magic in the novels is bound to nature and there is a strong connection to Welsh mythology and Arthuriana. Most of this can be found in one of the more important places in the series, Cadesuwater, a place with otherworldly qualities, but also in the personal connections and the otherness of the supernatural characters of the series. The series shows influence by the Celtic characteristics that were a part of the Celtic twilight and by aspects of Celtic literature in general.

The first chapter will discuss celticism and the general way that celticism influences literature, old and modern. The second chapter will discuss the concept of otherness and the otherness of the magical characters in *The Raven Cycle*. The following chapter will discuss the elements of Arthuriana and Celtic mythology in *The Raven Cycle*, with a focus on the characters and their relationships. The fourth chapter will discuss the Otherworld in Celtic literature and the Otherworld of Cadesuwater in *The Raven Cycle*.

## Chapter 1: Celticism

As mentioned above, the Celtic Twilight was a movement, which was most present during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and connected to the Irish struggle for independence. Celtic literature was used to emphasise how great Ireland used to be and the heritage that the inhabitants shared. Therefore, it is also connected to nationalism. The literature written within the Celtic Twilight drew inspiration from Celtic myths. Writers such as W.B Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Plunkett, Lord Dunsany would take the stories written in medieval Wales and Ireland and use them as inspiration or adapt them. They used them to show the Celtic heritage, the history that those places have in common and the foundation that lies beneath contemporary culture, such as Arthurian myths. Several place names still refer to this heritage and so do certain films and modern literature that show influence by Arthurian myths. In Yeats' view Celtic literature was for a time one of the main sources of inspiration for European literature ("The Literary Movement in Ireland" 364).

The Celtic Twilight is known for its use of nature and magic to categorise Celtic literature. However, this view is not fuelled by Celticism alone. Yeats and other writers of the Irish Revival were also interested in the Orient, specifically in mysticism and the ancient cultures. There, Yeats "discovered age-old parallels to what he saw as a vanishing Celtic Ireland" (Lennon 247). This ties into the concept of colonialism. The Irish fought for their independence and also to not be viewed through the eyes of the colonizing England (248). Yeats did however write in English, because much of his intended audience would not understand Irish. His use of Medieval myths also gave the Irish who lost their language a way to connect with their past. The interest in both Celtic literature and in the Orient led to a blend of both aesthetics known as Celtic-Orientalism. Yeats borrows from the orient to underscore and add to his image about the "imaginative and nature-loving Celt" (Lennon 248). Both cultures share colonial oppression, but in his works Yeats is also influenced by the images of

the Orient based on Orientalism. This blend of different cultures leads to an inability to state which aspects belong to what culture. “Oriental and Celtic mantels are so closely related as exotic *others* to the center of the Empire” (250). The Irish revivalists, such as “James Stephens, James Cousins, George Russell and Frederick Ryan” orientalise the Celts and in doing so categorise them more strongly as the other (Lennon 249). Their cultural identities are changed. According to Shaw, the interpretation of Celtic literature by writers of the Celtic Twilight was incorrect. In his opinion the Celtic Twilight puts too much focus on nature and magic (260). The stories were much more realistic than portrayed, the magic was just a small element (269). These changes emphasise the position of Celtic Literature during the Celtic Twilight as a construction of images instead of a complete view of the culture and literature. The concept of otherness in *The Raven Cycle* will be explored in the next chapter.

In *The Raven Cycle* the magic is connected to ley lines and Glendower. With him the magic is strongly connected to Wales. Glendower was a Welsh hero who was used in Welsh literature as a nationalistic symbol, changing with the times. The image of such a hero might change over time to suit the image the people need. The hero gives the people “strength” and helps them “accomplish their aims” (Henken 1). It also serves to connect people to their history and culture and in doing so strengthens the social cohesion (1). In *The Raven Cycle*, Gansey believes that Glendower is moved across the ley lines in order to keep him alive and safe (*The Raven Boys* 215-6). The line that crosses through Virginia is connected to the United Kingdom and also runs through Wales, once again linking the magic to Wales (206). “The ley line was raw, uncontrollable, inexplicable energy. The stuff of legends” (152). The lines cross all over the world and are all in some way connected. The lines are not based on Celtic legends, but they are connected to both nature and magic. Magic is easier closer to a ley line. The powers of the Greywarens, people who can dream things into being, draw energy from the ley line. If they use their powers too much they can drain the ley line’s

energy (*The Dream Thieves* 338). Blue's family trades in predictions. "The predictions that came out of 300 Fox Way were unspecific, but undeniably true" (*The Raven Boys* 3). This is influenced by Henrietta, Virginia, the town where they live, being located on a ley line. The lines are connected to spiritual places like Cabeswater, a forest where the trees speak Latin (245). Cabeswater and the fluency of time is linked to "Scottish folklore" and travellers being "led astray by territorial fairies" (210-11). Cabeswater is described as having large, old trees and being "green, green, green" (211). Much attention is paid to describing the surroundings and the nature of Cabeswater. There is a hollow tree in Cabeswater and if the characters stand inside it they see visions of the future (226). The place in the novel where magic is at its strongest is also where most attention is paid to nature. They are connected. Other places on the ley lines are marked by special occurrences in nature, such as giant drawings of birds and other animals that can only be seen from the air. The lines are also marked by sightings of paranormal activities (206-10). Before the start of the novels Gansey has already travelled much along the ley lines. The emphasis on nature in connection to their adventures shows a sense of nostalgia, a desire for nature, similar to the desire described by Yeats.

*The Raven Cycle* also makes use of namedropping, to remind the reader of the Celtic heritage the story relies on. One character is called Malory. Thomas Malory was a writer of Arthurian legends. In the novels the character Malory is a professor from England who assists Gansey with his quest. Another name is Monmouth manufacturing, an abandoned factory where Gansey, Noah and Ronan live. Monmouth is a town in Wales and the name of the 12<sup>th</sup> century historian Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in which he also wrote about King Arthur (Reeve). Other examples of alluding to the Celtic heritage through small details are the tarot cards that are used and often laid out in the shape of a Celtic cross (*The Dream Thieves* 44). Also, in *The Raven Cycle* Gansey refers to Glendower as the Raven King and the boys are called the raven boys, because of the emblem on their

school uniforms. All the boys who go to Aglionby Academy are referred to as raven boys by the local people. Ronan also has a raven as a pet. The medieval Welsh tale *The second branch of the Mabinogi*, is about a king called Brân. His name means crow or raven (“Explanatory Notes” 232). According to Davies ravens are also used as a metaphor for warriors in Welsh poetry (278). The ravens are used to create a connection between *The Raven Cycle* and Celtic literature. While one name might be seen as a coincidence, these instances taken together are clearly ways of connecting the story to Wales and Arthuriana and in doing so connecting magic to the Celtic heritage that the series makes use of.

This connection between nature, magic and Celtic legends that can be seen in *The Raven Cycle* can be seen in other pieces of young adult literature as well. According to Alessandra Petrina, the lake in the *Harry Potter* series can be linked to the lake in the work of Thomas Malory. “The lake connects Harry and his fellow students with a form of magic that seems deeper and more fascinating” (102). The forbidden forest is also an important location in the series. In many Arthurian legends the forest is an important location. The forest is mysterious and dangerous. This is where the characters face their fears and themselves and are confronted with many magical creatures (106). In *Harry Potter* the forest is necessary for the development of the characters. The use of Arthuriana in *Harry Potter* cannot always be connected to one specific point. Arthuriana are used in a more generic way that can be linked to the motifs that could be recognised in other forms of literature. When Harry pulls the sword of Gryffindor out of a magical hat in the second book this echoes the legend of the sword in the stone, but this is one of the few clearer instances (Petrina 100-1). Mostly the elements are clear enough to be categorised as Celtic, but the actual origins are unknown. The use of Celtic legends in modern literature has changed from clear sources that are adapted, to the scattered use of the collective myths that the reader will recognise.

## Chapter 2: Otherness

Otherness is a concept often linked to colonialism. It explains the way the identity of a people is shaped, not by themselves, but by a dominant culture or coloniser. This can often be seen as a “traditional concept of ‘west and rest’”, but it is also relevant on a smaller scale (Hallam and Street 1). The described other is not someone who is actually encountered, but an image, made up of other images. The Celtic Twilight is accused of othering the Celts (Lennon 264). After much of the Gaelic culture had been lost due to the English, the writers of the Celtic Twilight built “a new Irish nation” (274). The blending of oriental and Celtic legends led to the cultures and characters becoming others. This otherness means that the cultures were not treated true to their nature, but they were only significant because of the way they differ from the English culture. Within the concept of the Celtic Twilight this is mainly shown through the treatment of the literature, reducing the tales to being about nature and magic.

In *The Raven Cycle* the otherness is mostly shown through the characters feeling different, but they are also seen as different by the other characters. They do not know themselves and they are unable to see how the others see them. Magic is a barrier. It hinders the characters’ interactions with other people and leads to them feeling misunderstood and alone. They have a connection with magic that other people do not have. Magic is not a part of everyday life for most of the people within the society shown in the novels. However, while magic at first causes a distance between the characters and society, magic also helps them accept themselves and find friendship. Magic develops from being a barrier to a cohesive factor, but only within the group of the main characters. Magic becomes normal for the main characters, but this is not the case for the world they live in.

According to Andrea Dumančić and Biljana Oklopčić the different characters’ perspectives emphasise the feelings of otherness. The different perspectives show how everybody’s view of themselves and the others is marked by their own point of view (42).

Blue feels different from her family because she is not a psychic and she feels different from the boys because she is not rich and believes they are because they attend Aglionby Academy, which causes her to dislike the boys at first. This changes when she discovers that Adam is also poor, but she still feels inferior to the boys (Dumančić and Oklopčić 43). While she is not psychic like her family, she does have powers which alienate her from everybody else. She acts as a beacon and strengthens the powers of the psychics. Noah, who is a ghost, is stronger in her presence (*The Raven Boys* 388). Her supernatural qualities make that she feels like an other, but so does her lack of psychic powers. She thinks other people see her in a certain way, that she does not agree with. In the first two novels she is the only one with her ability, but in the third novel, *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*, the group finds the daughter of Glendower, who has the same powers (231, 279). This goes hand in hand with Blue's development to feeling like she is a part of the group instead of an outsider. She is learning to accept herself and see herself as an equal to the boys (Dumančić and Oklopčić 45).

Adam feels different because he is poor and abused. The other boys in the group are much richer than him. Adam does not want to accept their help because he wants to do everything on his own. This and the abuse by his father causes him to distance himself from the others. At the end of *The Raven Boys* Adam performs a ritual to wake a ley line. This connects him to the ley line, which causes him to distance himself even more. He is afraid to lose himself to the ley line (*The Dream Thieves* 356). He becomes an amnesiac and hides his problems from the others. It changes the way the other characters look at him. He is still a member of the group, but there is a distance (10). The connection to magic makes him an outsider, different from the group. The supernatural and him becoming a supernatural character allows him to develop and discover himself. He learns to trust his instincts (Dumančić and Oklopčić 52). "Through the long process of personal growth and change, his

stubborn and self-reliant individuality is eventually replaced by the part-of-a-friend-and-kin-group identity” (52).

Ronan is a greywaren. His ability to create objects and people from his dreams plays a large role in *The Dream Thieves*, where he is being chased because of his powers. Ronan learns that he is able to take things from his dreams with him when he wakes up. The most prominent example of this is his pet raven, Chainsaw. “I took Chainsaw out of my dreams” (*The Raven Boys* 408). In a way, Ronan’s discovery actually leads him to be closer to people. Kavinsky, a boy who goes to Aglionby, is also a greywaren. Throughout *The Dream Thieves* they build a relationship. At the start of the novels Ronan struggles with accepting himself. During the second novel he develops his powers and at the end he is able to accept them. His powers help him discover parts of himself he was not willing to see before. When Ronan accepts his powers and accepts himself he gains control. Because of his powers he does not hate himself anymore. At first the discovery of his powers leads the group to understand him less. They do not know him as well as they thought they did (*The Dream Thieves*, 150). However, in the end this is overcome. Ronan has always been a more distant character, but through his point of view it is shown that he really cares about the others (Dumančić and Oklopčić 50).

Gansey is not necessarily a magical character, but his storyline is filled with magic. He does things that might be magical, but they are few and non-consistent. He leads the group in their search for Glendower and fully believes in the supernatural. In the first book he also appears as a ghost on St. Mark’s Eve. On that night all the souls who will depart in the coming year walk the corpse road, a ley line, into an abandoned church (*The Raven Boys*, 5). Blue knows this, but Gansey does not. Gansey is a character for whom magic acts as a strengthening factor. He formed the group around him because of his search for Glendower. When Gansey was a child he almost died, and he heard a voice telling him to go

looking for Glendower. He survived because he was on a ley line and someone else on that ley line was dying needlessly. The ley line saved his life (271). It is later revealed that the someone else who died was Noah. At the end of *The Raven King*, the final novel, it is revealed that Noah told Gansey to go looking for Glendower. He is able to talk to Gansey because Noah died in Cableswater, and its magical properties allow him to see what will happen. Noah's death is revealed at the end of the first novel. He has been dead for seven years, but the energy of the ley line allows him to still be present. Noah is clearly different from the rest of the group. He is often unnoticed by the other characters until he says something. He also seems to know things that he could not logically know. When the other characters find out that he is a ghost he becomes more distant, but this is also because they are more aware of his presence. At first, they were less aware of him and did not notice as much when he was not around. Now that they know that he is dead, they notice when he is gone. In this case it is the awareness of the supernatural that creates the gap between him and the others. While the group is together because of him, he remains an outsider until the end. He is dead, and this cannot be changed.

Noah's actions show how in the last novel the otherness caused by magic is overcome. Magic becomes the binding agent for the group. Not only is it the reason for their quest, it is the reason they found each other. So, while magic might at first be seen as an element that emphasises the otherness of the characters, it also binds them together. As Dumančić and Oklopčić put it, "Coming to terms with the raven boys' otherness leads Blue to accept her own otherness" (45). *The Raven Cycle* shows a less idealistic form of magic than is usually shown in works influenced by Celticism. It is not all positive. There are down sides, since the bond the characters share leads to them being disconnected from the real world, but this gives a more complete image of the characters and makes them more human.

The characters still become others, but it is done in a different way than during the Celtic Twilight. The characters accept their otherness.

### Chapter 3: Arthuriana and *The Raven Cycle*

One of the aspects of Celticism is the use of Arthuriana, in *The Raven Cycle* is shown by the plot and the group dynamic, both of which are inspired by Arthuriana and other Celtic literature. Like in the Harry Potter series, the work is not based on one specific tale but on broader aspects that are associated with Arthuriana, many of which can be found in Celtic literature. There are also several French versions, but Arthur was a Welsh king. The novels use Arthurian legends as inspiration for the plot and the group dynamic. Many of the characters show traits similar to the characters found in Celtic Literature, this is clearest in the connection between Gansey and Arthur.

Furthermore, the novels make explicit references to Celtic myths and also establish a connection between the group dynamic and another Welsh king, Glendower (*The Raven Boys* 230-1). As Gansey remarks: “Glendower travelled with magi, did you know? Magicians, I mean. Wizards” (*The Dream Thieves* 11). In *The Raven Cycle* both Gansey and Glendower are referred to as the raven king (*The Dream Thieves* 264; *The Raven King* 342). Within the novels there are stories of Glendower being able to talk to birds and Gansey also seems to have this ability (*The Dream Thieves* 264; *The Raven King* 341). In his quest for Glendower, Gansey tries to find himself as well. Glendower is who Gansey wants to be (Dumančić and Oklopčić 47-8). Ronan, Blue, Adam and Noah all have magical abilities and they use these in their quest. They fulfil the role of the magicians. In many modern adaptations of Arthur, the king is accompanied by Merlin, an older and wiser character who guides the king in his quest. The show *Merlin* (2008) focusses on this dynamic. Merlin also plays a role in the works of 15<sup>th</sup> century writer Malory. He can also be found in the works of 19<sup>th</sup> century writer Alfred Tennyson and *The Book of Merlyn* by T. H. White, which are both based on the work of Malory. In *The Raven Cycle* the equivalent character is Professor Malory. He is a British

professor who met Gansey when he was in England (*The Raven Boys* 247). When Gansey needs advice, he calls Malory.

Aside from Glendower and Merlin, the group dynamic echoes the dynamic of Arthur and the knights of the round table as well. Gansey is referred to as a king (*The Raven Boys* 174; *The Raven King* 333, 336-7). This does not mean that he is of royal blood, but that he acts like a king. He leads the group and the others follow him (*The Raven Boys* 221). They admire him and care about what he thinks. When the group is threatened by a demon the only way to defeat it is with a sacrifice. Gansey is willing to sacrifice himself for his friends, to protect them: “I didn’t want you guys to hurt anymore” (*The Raven King* 373). King Arthur is usually seen as a good and gracious king, who looks after his people: “The noblest of all noble kings” (Barber 17).

Gansey is doomed from the start of the novels. Blue knows that he will die, because she saw his ghost. Several different adaptations show Arthur as a tragic hero, who cannot escape his fate and dies a tragic death (Barber 45). This can be seen in the BBC adaptation *Merlin* (2008), where Arthur dies in battle when he is still quite young. In some versions he does not die, but he disappears. In *Le Morte d’Arthur* Arthur is brought to the Isle of Avalon after being gravely injured (Malory 209). In T. H. White’s *The Once and Future King* it is also described that Arthur does not die but goes to Avalon to recover and wait for better times. This fits into the characterisation of Arthur being a sleeping king, a hero who will return when he is needed most. His death is another aspect in which Gansey resembles Arthur. At the end of the final book Blue kisses Gansey so he can die as a sacrifice. Blue is told not to kiss boys, because if she kisses her true love he will die (*The Raven Boys* 6). Blue cannot usually see ghosts, but she can see Gansey’s ghost. This could be because she kills him or because he is her true love, or in her case both (*The Raven Boys* 16). However, after Gansey dies he is revived again in Cakeswater (*The Raven King* 415, 426). What is different

here is that Gansey can stay with his friends after he is revived while Arthur has to leave in order to heal, and his friends do not see him again (Tennyson 299). For them it will be as if he died.

Several modern Arthur adaptations, such as *First Knight* (1995) and the French musical *La Légende du Roi Arthur* (2015) focus on the love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot, which is also seen in some of the different versions of the myths (Barber 73). It is used in the works of Malory and in *The Idylls of the King* by Alfred Tennyson. In *The Raven Cycle* Gansey, Blue and Adam are also in a love triangle, but it is handled differently. Love triangles are quite common in young adult literature, such as *Twilight*, *The Selection*, *City of Bones* and *The Hunger Games* to name a few. Blue first starts a relationship with Adam, but it soon becomes clear that she and Gansey are attracted to each other. Blue and Gansey do not often act upon their feelings for one another, but it is constantly present throughout the novels. This is influenced by it being foretold that “this was the year she’d fall in love” (*The Dream Thieves* 6). Blue is afraid she will kill Gansey, so she tries to keep him at a distance (265, 387). *The Raven Cycle* is different from the love triangle in the Arthurian legends, because Blue, who takes the place of Guinevere, chooses the king, Gansey and not the knight. The triangle also disintegrates naturally and does not cause any large problems for the group as opposed to Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* and Tennyson’s *The Idylls of the King* where Guinevere cheats on Arthur and it causes chaos. It is one of the factors leading to Camelot falling apart. Blue is not judged like Guinevere (Tennyson 282), she is allowed to change her mind.

Aside from acting as Guinevere, Blue can also be seen as the Grail. One of the legends of Arthur is about the quest for the Holy Grail. In Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* the Holy Grail is a golden cup and contains the blood of Christ. Some of the knights of the round table go on a quest to find it. The grail has the ability to make food and drink appear and it

can heal people (94, 104). It gives the knights new energy. The Grail pushes the narrative. It gives the knights reason to act, because they only go to search for it once they have seen it and it disappeared. The boys want Blue to join their group and when she is a part of the group both Adam and Gansey are attracted to her. Also, when her mom makes predictions about Blue, she says that one specific card is Blue's card, the page of cups. It is the card that is always connected to her. The card stands for love, friendship and possibilities. On the card is a girl, who looks like Blue and who is holding a golden goblet, reminiscent of the grail (*The Dream Thieves* 44). The Grail in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is also held by a maiden, who arrives and disappears with the grail (84, 91). It is the same way in the version of Chrétien de Troyes (Loomis 41). Blue is the last one to join the group and without her it was incomplete. She has information that is vital for the group finding the ley lines. With the information she gives them the energy to continue their search. She gives them the directions for their quest and a clearer image of what they are looking for. Without her they could not complete their quest. She brings love to the group dynamic and the possibility of finding Glendower by helping the boys find the ley line. She causes the quest to advance.

The plot of the story is based on a quest, like the quest for the grail. The focus of the quest is on the mythical sleeping king of Glendower, who like Arthur is also one of these sleeping kings. In a way Glendower resembles the grail as well, because the prophesy about him is Gansey's motivation to start the quest and he is also the goal. Both Arthur and Glendower are seen as redeemer-kings of Wales (Henken 84, 192). Glendower was initially not a mythical character, but through the way he is treated in literature he becomes one. He develops from a historical character into a redeemer who never died but just disappeared (Henken 70). His "return is looked to as a solution to society's problems today" (70). This is also the way he is seen in *The Raven Cycle*. He is remembered as a king who never died but is still asleep, hidden on the ley line. When he is found he will grant whoever found him a

wish. He has the ability to save people. When the group finds Glendower, he is not just asleep but really dead. It seems as if their quest has been for nothing. Even though Glendower is dead, he still acted as a solution to the problems the different people in the group were dealing with. If they had not been searching for Glendower they would not have learned to accept themselves, they would not have discovered their full potential and they would still be alone. Without the quest they also would not have found Glendower's daughter, who was asleep on the ley line. She teaches the group that Glendower was not a good king and she teaches Gansey what being a king is about (*The Raven King* 336). Because of this Gansey decides to sacrifice himself. He does what a good king should do and in doing so becomes a redeemer hero himself. He did not die when he was supposed to, when the ley line saved him as a child, and now he can be a saviour to his people. He becomes someone that people can look up to and find strength in, like the characters of Arthur and Glendower whom he shares many characteristics with.

*The Raven Cycle* shows many similarities with early Arthur adaptations, but changes the purpose of the quest. In the end the quest is not the end goal but the means for the group to connect, caused by Noah who goes back in time to tell them about Glendower so that they will become friends. In the works of Tennyson and Malory, the quest for the grail is one of the reasons that many of the knights of the round table die and the group falls apart, but in *The Raven Cycle* the quest causes the group to become closer. Blue does not destroy the group, even though the prophesy of her kiss does show that potential. She could have caused the group to fall apart, but her influence is different from Guinevere and the quest for the grail. She helps the group become closer to each other and she helps Gansey realise his destiny.

## Chapter 4: The Otherworld

One of the aspects of *The Raven Cycle* in which the influence of Celtic literature is clearest is Cageswater. Cageswater is the forest found on the ley lines, near the town where the main characters live. Cageswater is the place where different Celtic aspects of the series come together. It is the place where magic and nature are united, and it is the focal point of the quest, because this is where the main characters believe that Glendower is buried. Cageswater is an Otherworld. The Otherworld is a concept that is often found in Celtic Medieval literature. There are many different incarnations of the Otherworld. It often functions as a land of the dead or a land of the gods (Forest, chapter 6). The Otherworld is also often presented as the home of fairies and other supernatural creatures. According to John Hodges two characteristics of an Otherworld are “trees and singing birds engaged in a religious service” and “it is a Land of Women” (283). Danu Forest also states how trees, often oak trees, are central to the Otherworld (chapter 6). This use of trees is partly found in *The First Branch of the Mabinogi*, because Pwyll enters the Otherworld while hunting in a forest (“The First Branch of the Mabinogi” 5; “Explanatory Notes” 228). It can also be found in Cageswater. Cageswater is a forest filled with old trees and singing birds (*The Raven Boys* 219). One tree is different from the others. It is a hollow oak tree and when they step inside it they see visions (225). There is not a clear link to religion in *The Raven cycle*. Neither Christianity nor pagan forms of religion play a significant role in the series. In a way Cageswater can also be seen as a land of women. The characters who come to live and survive in Cageswater are mostly women. Gwenllian, the daughter of Glendower, sleeps in Cageswater for a long time without being harmed. Ronan’s mother and later also The Orphan Girl, a creature created by Ronan in his dreams, live in the heart of Cageswater, the rose glen (*The Raven King* 63). The only man to live in Cageswater for a longer time is Artemus, Blue’s estranged father. While these characters live or spend a long time in Cageswater, they

are not native to the Otherworld. They merely do not fit in the real world. They are all characters with supernatural qualities, which is usual for inhabitants of the Otherworld.

Not all sources state the use of nature as a characteristic of the Otherworld. John Carey describes the Otherworld as being made up of inorganic compounds, such as gems (31). In the myth of Oisín this use of trees is also not present, there is more of a focus on water as this is how Oisín reaches the Otherworld. The Otherworld is often reached through aerial journeys or over water (Hodges 283). The first time the group finds Cableswater they travel by helicopter, but to actually reach Cableswater they follow a stream filled with fish that change colour (*The Raven Boys* 211, 219).

Another characteristic of the Otherworld is that time is not linear with the time in the real world (Hodges 283). In the Irish myth of *Oisín and the Land of Youth*, Oisín travels to the Otherworld. When he returns to Ireland after what he thinks is only a short time, he discovers that he has been gone for three hundred years (Rolleston 275). Time is a “fluid” concept in Cableswater (*The Raven Boys* 230). Watches do not work (220) and the group is often away much shorter or longer than what it felt like for them (230). This fluidity in time is explicitly linked to Celtic mythology. “In Scottish folklore, there was a long-held myth that travellers could be ‘pixy-led,’ or led astray by territorial fairies. [...] Like they’d tripped on a wrinkle in space/time” (231). Not only is the amount of time spent in Cableswater different from the amount of time passing outside of it, Cableswater also shows the characters visions of the future and the past. When the group is in Cableswater for the first time they find a message written by Ronan at a later time. Cableswater shows Blue visions of when Gansey will die (228). It also allows Noah to travel to different moments along the ley line. Time is explained as being a circle rather than a line (*The Raven King* 417).

Cableswater can be dangerous. It is a place people can get lost in because of the changing lay-out and the fluidness of time. They can be trapped for years. Artemus was

trapped in Cageswater for a long time and because of that he has become paranoid (*The Raven King* 6). There are also several caves in Cageswater, where Blue's mother and aunt become trapped (*Blue Lily, Lily Blue* 374, 388). In Celtic tales mortals can become trapped in the Otherworld as well. This happens in *The Third Branch of the Mabinogi*, after Rhiannon and Pryderi follow their dogs into a mysterious castle ("The Third Branch of the Mabinogi" 39-40). Oisín stays in the Otherworld for so long that when he returns his family is all dead. When he discovers how much time he has spent in the Otherworld he is devastated (Rolleston 275).

Apart from being dangerous, the Otherworld often has a protective role for the characters as well. King Arthur survives because he is brought to the Otherworld Avilion, where he can heal (Tennyson 299). The Otherworld grants Oisín a longer life and as long as he does not step on the ground of Ireland he will remain under that protection (Rolleston 275). Cageswater also has a protective role. In *The Raven King* it is said that the forest "loves them" (9). It keeps multiple people alive, who would not be able to still exist without Cageswater. Ronan's mother was created by his father, who was also a Greywaren. She is not an actual human, but a dream, and cannot continue to live when Ronan's father dies. Because Ronan's father was a powerful Greywaren she falls asleep instead of disappearing, which is what would usually happen (*The Raven King* 74). The only place where she can be awake is Cageswater. Noah only has a corporeal form when his bones are buried on the ley line (*The Raven Boys* 282, 408). This protection is not lasting as it is revealed in *The Raven King* that even as a ghost, Noah is slowly decomposing (44). Gwenllian is kept alive on the ley line for hundreds of years and Gansey's life is saved twice, first when he dies on the ley line away from Cageswater and the second time when he dies in Cageswater itself.

In *The Raven Boys* Adam performs a ritual to wake the ley line. In doing so he becomes connected to Cageswater. "I will be your hands, Adam thought. I will be your eyes"

(396). He can focus on this connection, which makes that he can feel its energy and he sees leaves before his eyes (*The Raven King* 23). It allows him to control and easily navigate Cableswater (59). Cableswater is described as a sentient forest, it has feelings and a consciousness. It learns to understand humans through its link with Adam. It also learns to speak English, where at first it only knew Latin (58). Cableswater tries to make Adam happy and is able to show him memories (60). Through its connection with Adam Cableswater becomes more than a place, it becomes a character. This is what makes Cableswater different from the other versions of the Otherworld. Usually the Otherworld is a place inhabited by supernatural characters and these characters are the focus of what makes this Otherworld so different. In the case of Cableswater, the forest is inhabited by its own consciousness. There are other differences. Mostly the Otherworld is part of a pattern of voyage and return, the character travels to the Otherworld and then returns to his own world, but this pattern cannot be found in *The Raven Cycle*. The characters travel to Cableswater on multiple occasions, but not in the same pattern that is usually found. Also, there is no castle, which is usually found in the Otherworld (Patch 605). But despite these differences Cableswater still shows many aspects of the Celtic Otherworld. It is clearly related to nature and the supernatural. The supernatural connects Cableswater to the existing tradition in Celtic Literature and it is the place where the use of celticism is clearest through the connection between nature and magic.

## Conclusion

*The Raven cycle* is influenced by the Celtic Twilight and by Celtic literature. Just like the literature that was written during the time when Celticism started, *The Raven Cycle* uses Celtic concepts as inspiration for the stories. *The Raven Cycle* relies on the Arthurian quest for the Grail, sleeping kings and the group dynamic of Arthur and the knights of the round table. It makes explicit references to the Celtic heritage that precedes it and uses familiar names and structures to make this connection even clearer for the reader. The way that *The Raven Cycle* handles this material shows the influence of the Celtic Twilight. In the series there is an emphasis on nature in connection to magic. Magic is strongest and most present when it is linked to nature. The clearest example of this is Cableswater, a forest where magic is stronger and more present than in any other aspect of the series. Cableswater is an example of the use of Celtic myth, because Cableswater is an Otherworld. Cableswater connects the use of nature and magic to existing Celtic myths and Arthuriana, and so becomes the place where Celticism is found most clearly. Celticism influences the way that *The Raven Cycle* uses Celtic culture, in ways that could perhaps also be found in other young adult series. This study focussed only on *The Raven cycle*, so no statement can be made for the influence of Celticism in other novels. However, there have been similar studies on the use of Arthuriana. While the use of Celtic works does not necessarily mean that the work is influenced by Celticism, it is one of the characteristics of the Celtic Twilight.

There is one aspect where *The Raven Cycle* handles things differently than the Celtic Twilight. Celticism was criticised for othering the Celts. This also happens to the supernatural characters in *The Raven Cycle*. Their connection to magic makes them different, but they do not mind. Because of magic they develop and bond and while this bond sets them apart even more, they become more accepting towards themselves. The characters were always different, but they learn to be happy with being different. This does not change that

the way that Celtic culture is used and depicted is still influenced by Celticism, which causes the Celts to be seen different from what they were.

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Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen  
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