



The Needles' Eye: Margaret Drabble's Exploration of Religious Morality and its Intertextuality with the Bible and the Quran

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Drabble's *The Needle's Eye* (1972) is a remarkable literary achievement that concentrates on religious morality, spirituality, materialism, personal relationships, and social classes. Due to the novel's title, which indirectly alludes to the metaphor of "the camel passing through the eye of the needle" mentioned in both the Gospel of Matthew(19:24) and Surah Al-A'raf (7:40), and its protagonist, Rose , who directly states the Gospel of Matthew(19:24), the research aims to examine Drabble's explicit and implicit intertextuality with religious texts: the Bible and the Quran. The study presents various definitions of intertextuality highlighting its major types in literature. It also profoundly concerns the influence of Biblical and Quranic intertextuality on characterization of the main characters especially their moral and spiritual transformation throughout the progress of the novel. Furthermore, the research sheds light on the technique of omniscient narrator which enhances Drabble's religious message of Divine guidance.

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Received: 31 August 2025

Accepted: 29 September 2025

Published: 01 November 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1322>



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Cite:

Younis, L. Y. T., & Muhammed , N. M. H. (n.d.).

"The Needle's Eye: Margaret Drabble's Exploration of Religious Morality and its Intertextuality with the Bible and the Quran".

Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 21(4).

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1322>

Keywords: The Needle's Eye, Margaret Drabble, Intertextuality

رواية عين الإبرة للكاتبة مارغريت درابل: استكشاف الأخلاقيات الدينية وتناصها مع الإنجيل والقرآن

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المُستخلص

تُعد رواية عين الإبرة (1972) للكاتبة مارغريت درابل إنجازًا أدبيًا متميزًا يركز على الأخلاقيات الدينية والروحانيات والماديات والعلاقات الشخصية والطبقات الاجتماعية. وفقا لعنوان الرواية الذي يُلمح بشكل غير مباشر إلى الاستعارة الواردة في "مرور الجمل من ثقب الإبرة" والتي ذُكرت في كل من إنجيل متى (24:19) وسورة الأعراف (7:40)، والبطلة التي ذكرت بشكل مباشر الحكاية الرمزية من إنجيل متى (24:19)، فإن هدف البحث هو دراسة التناص مع النصوص الدينية: الإنجيل والقرآن، سواء كان هذا التناص صريحًا أم ضمنيًا. علاوة على ذلك، تقدم الدراسة بعض تعريفات التناص التي توضح أنواعه الرئيسية في الأدب. ويركز البحث بعمق على تأثير التناص الإنجيلي والقرآني في بناء الشخصيات الرئيسية، ولا سيما تحولهم الأخلاقي والروحي مع تطور أحداث الرواية. كما يسلط البحث الضوء على تقنية الراوي العليم التي تعزز رسالة درابل الدينية حول التوجيه الإلهي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رواية عين الإبرة، مارغريت درابل، التناص.

Introduction:

Margaret Drabble (1939, __), "the author of a prize winning fiction" (Zheltukhina,2013,p.3), has been rewarded numerous tributes like: the John Llewelyn Rhys Memorial Prize, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the E. M. Forster Award in 1973, and the CBE (Companion of the British Empire) from Queen Elizabeth the second (Sadler,1986). She proudly comments on her own accolades saying:

"I'd worked jolly hard on many committees and gone to lectures in various places, but I love doing it all and I feel slightly guilty about the fact that things I love doing should be rewarded. But on the other hand, people say it is very good for literature and women to be honored and it is also useful in various professional ways to have these letters after one's name, so, yes I'm delighted" (Parker,1983, p.177).

Drabble's focus is on discussing the psychological and social dilemmas of her own time, particularly, class distinction, moral confrontations, and existential problems which are regarded as the dominant issues of post-war Britain. As Joyce Carol Oates affirms:

"Miss Drabble presents characters who are not passively witnessing their lives (and ours); she is not a writer who reflects the helplessness of the stereotyped "sick society," but one who has taken upon herself the task, largely ignored today, of attempting the active, vital, energetic, mysterious re-creation of a set of values by which human beings can live"(Oates,1972, p.34).

Many women critics praise Drabble's novel, among them is Joan Manheimer who declares in her essay "Margaret Drabble and the Journey to the Self" that The Needle's Eye is the "strongest novel"(Manheimer, 1978, p.140). Also, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese in her "The Ambiguities of Female Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Margaret Drabble," describes the novel as "far and away her best novel to date, and a fine novel by any standard"(Fox-Genovese, 1979, p. 248).

A deep investigation of The Needle's Eye leads critics to recognize that Drabble deals with the issues concerning both female and male in contemporary society. Thus, she equally examines the internal and external struggles of the Rose, Simon and Christopher. As Ellen Rose notices that The Needle's Eye "divid[es] her [Drabble's] career quite neatly in two", then Drabble started treating "broader themes that are not limited to the situation of women" themes that deal with "strong male characters, the effect of heredity and environment on characters, or the condition of England" (Rose,1980, pp.4-5). The plot of

Drabble's novel forms "a set of social relationships with equal concentration on the presentation of men and women"(Anderson,1994,p.116). In fact, she widens her fictional scope to evaluate not only the issues of women, but also the problems that concern men and women alike. Moreover, Drabble's fiction works as a "bridge" between the nineteenth century tradition and its continuity in the twentieth century. Therefore, she is known to be a "moralist" with an "old fashioned social conscience"(Sadler,1986, p.132). Generally, she does not only treat individual problems but also addresses universal questions of social and religious morality. However, she herself emphasizes that:

"Morality is so relative and writing is a constant process of relating shifting morality to shifting society and working out where it's going to. I can't imagine myself ever going into a Lawrentian condemnatory blast about evils of society. I don't see it like that at all. I mean I'm not a moralist in the denunciatory sense"(Parker, 1983, p.176).

Rajni Devi praises Drabble as a British novelist proposing that:

"Drabble is one of the most popular contemporary British women novelists who have their own church, their own chair, their own philosophy_ their own outlook on life and many sided problems" (Devi, 2017, p.1).

Andrea Barrett describes Drabble, recommending that she is,

"a living writer, a woman writer— who was unafraid to tackle large subjects, and who did well the things I so loved in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels while at the same time brilliantly conveying life as lived it right now"(Barrett, 2012, p.vii).

The Needle's Eye examines some critical issues in post-war England, including capitalism, materialism, social stratification, and feminism, as well as individualistic concerns such as religious faith, morality, sacrifice, family relationships, duty and wealth. Drabble reveals that the love of wealth and power has the capacity to corrupt individuals and society just as poverty and impotence do. In fact, the title of the novel, *The Needle's Eye*, is a direct reference to Jesus Christ's parable about the eye of the needle and the rich man's impossibility of entering Paradise, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.....;" because the parable is mentioned in the novel. Similarly, the title of the novel echoes a verse in Surah Al-A'raf in the Quran, ".....until a camel enters into the eye of a needle". These religious intertexts highlight Rose Vassiliou's psychological conflict with wealth. The novel presents a critical study of materialism in the contemporary world. The analysis of the internal and external conflicts of the main characters reveals the difficulties of making moral choices and fulfilling religious duties in an urban city like London. Margaret Drabble admires the novel and its setting, saying, "I think probably *The Needle's Eye*. Partly because it is the longest. It was hard work and I felt proud of it. And partly because I was very fond of that period of my life. I like shabby houses and I like small children."(Hardin, 1973, p.79).

Intertextuality and Narrative Strategies in *The Needle's Eye*:

The concept of intertextuality, which is regarded as "both an artistic and visionary tool"(Jaaja, 2025, p.117), appeared early in the first discussions about texts in human history. It has been known as a kind of relation that a text has to other texts, which belong to different cultural, religious and conventional aspects. In the postmodern literary criticism, intertextuality has become one of the most important and contentious concepts. It was firstly been coined as a literary theory in 1966 by the French linguist Julia Kristeva, who states that a text is "a permutation or combination of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text, in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one

another”(Kristeva, 1966/1986, p.73). This statement explains that most of the written works include suggestions from previous works. For Kristeva, all literary and non-literary works are intertexts, as they all contain references to varied pre-existing texts. Hence, an intertext may reproduce, enhance or communicate the original texts. Each writer is basically a reader of some influential prior books, and thus he/she may use citations, impressions, allusions or quotations to reflect his affection. Graham Allen believes that each literary work has meaning built from traditions, conventions and codes that are established either by literary works or by non-literary works and either by the same culture or by various cultures. So any literary or non-literary text is regarded by modern theorists as not independent in its meaning and interpretation, and it certainly has a relation to preceding texts. In his book *Intertextuality*, Allen declares that:

“Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations”(Allen, 2000, p.1).

T.S. Eliot, in his “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” implies that the relation between a literary work on one side and the tradition and culture on the other is like a great network of texts. Intertextuality as a technique can provide the reader with numerous ideas for interpreting a literary work, which is actually considered an open network of various texts (Eliot, 2015, p.326). Ismail A. Ahmed thinks that “Intertextuality is the concept that all written works are made from other works, that all writing challenges, continues, restates, or modifies previous writing. Intertextuality then is part of the basic creation and interpretation of text”(Ahmed,2003, p.5). A literary text echoes other texts either explicitly or implicitly, or either directly or indirectly; therefore it has layers of interpretations, analyses, and meanings rather than one specific meaning limited to the writer's vision.

As a result of the globalization and the technological revolution that have invaded the whole world, communication and interaction between different cultures of various nations have become inevitable. This interaction appears clearly in literature through the technique of intertextuality that occurs not only in literature of the same language but also between different languages. Intertextuality encompasses all kinds of human interactions with a literary work, including religious, social, educational, cultural and moral aspects. As Albay and Serbes emphasize, “Intertextuality broadens the dimensions of the meaning of any literary work through building new cultural, religious, historical, philosophical or even moral bridges”. They continue their explanation, saying:

“Literature is not the product of a specific nation; rather it is a combination of the experiences of all nations. So to speak, there is inheritance amongst the literary texts all over the world literature. Thinking of the global changes and technological development, it is quite easy to see the issue of interaction between the nations which is called intertextuality”(Albay & Serbes, 2017, pp.3-4).

In her essay, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, Kristeva refers to this inheritance as "intertextuality," which is “a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another”(Kristeva,1966/1986, p.234). She considers any literary text an intertext that interacts with other literary or non-literary texts. The connection between a text and others may appear in various forms like “direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected” (Kristeva,1966/ 1986, p.40).

Many modern theorists and linguists have developed their own definitions of the concept of intertextuality. Gerard Genette thinks of intertextuality as “literal co-presence of one text within another (e.g., quotation, plagiarism, allusion)”(Genette,1997, pp.1-2). Riffaterre maintains that the meaning of a text depends on the reader's recognition of the implied intertext, for example, “a previous text, genre convention, or social discourse”. He emphasizes the role of the reader in exploring the meaning that resides in the relationship between the “surface text and the presupposed model” (Riffaterre,1978, p.164). While Roland Barthes does not state a specific definition for intertextuality, he establishes an important foundation for the concept. So, in his famous essay “Death of the Author”, he explains that a text is “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of cultures”, not the invention of the author who is just a “scriptor”. For Barthes, the meaning of a text is discovered through the interplay of various cultural texts (Barthes,1977, p.145). Norman Fairclough in his book *Discourse and Social Change*, explains that intertextuality is the basic material of all discourse, whether written or spoken. He examines two kinds of intertextuality: Manifest Intertextuality, which is the explicit existence of other texts in the original text; and, Constitutive Intertextuality, which is defined as a mixture of numerous cultural codes and different styles within a text, shedding light on social conventions and cultural traditions beyond the basic text (Fairclough, 1992). “The good of a book lies in its being read. A book is made up of signs that speak of other signs, which in their turn speak of things. Without an eye to read them, a book contains signs that produce no concepts; therefore, it is dumb”(Eco,1983, p.396). These qualities of a good book are what distinguish Drabble's *The Needle's Eye*. Marjorie May Anderson sees in Drabble's fictional strategy that it,

“serves to make a literary text an open rather than a closed, self contained construct. Readers are directed to considerations beyond the pages of one fictional society to the pages of another and, in that way are being encouraged to draw comparisons, test assumptions and readjust patterns as a sociologist must when studying patterns of human thoughts and behavior”(Anderson, 1994, pp.116-117).

A fundamental technical and thematic basis of *The Needle's Eye* is its intertextuality with Divine religious texts. “One of the stock metaphors that the three Semitic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – share is a huge animal passing through the eye of needle”(James, 2014, p.45). The recurrent use of the metaphor of the camel's passing through the needle in the Bible and the Quran reflects the universality of their message. As “Many contemporary scholars are now cognizant of the fact that the Bible and the Qur'an participate in and creatively exploit a common pool of discourse” (Reeves,2003, p.2). Many contemporary biblical scholars are aware that the Bible and Quran share and exploit a common layer of discourse consisting of several stories and themes. Galadari suggests that “the Qur'an is engaging with its counterpart in the Gospels”(Galadari, 2018, p.81).

The novel's title is a direct reference to Jesus's parable in the Bible: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”(Matthew,19:24, New International Version, 2011). And the protagonist of the novel, Rose, says the former parable and applies it practically in her life. She knows that this Biblical phrase implies that spiritual salvation is impossible to achieve for a human being unless he shares his wealth with the poor and the less privileged. It also warns people against materialism and urges them to stick to righteousness. This saying is revealed after Jesus meets with a rich man who asks how to renounce his wealth and material possessions in order to be one of the Christ followers.

In nearly the same context, a similar metaphor is found in the Holy Quran: “Indeed, those who deny Our verses and are arrogant toward them—the gates of Heaven will not be opened for them, nor will they enter Paradise until a camel enters into the eye of a needle. And thus do We recompense the

criminals”(Surah Al-A’raf ,7:40. Ali, 1934). This Quranic verse implies that it is impossible for the haughty and arrogant persons, “istakbarū”(Shafi & Usmani, 2010), who refuse to obey God’s orders to enter Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of the needle. This is the way by which God punishes the sinful criminals. The verse emphasizes faith and humility as the basic codes in the life of every human being. In his essay, “The Camel Passing Through the Eye of the Needle: A Qur’anic Interpretation of the Gospels”, Abdullah Galadari observes that:

“[T]here are textual parallels that can be extracted from both texts and go beyond simply the use of this analogy in common, as previous scholars have thought. For instance, the rich man in the Gospels is asking about inheriting eternal life, while the Qur’an also discusses eternal life and inheritance in the same context” (Galadari,2018,p.80).

Rose Vassiliou, the heroine of Drabble’s novel, adopts the philosophy of the Biblical and Quranic metaphor of the camel passing through the eye of the needle through her psychological and social transformation. She radically rejects her wealth and follows her spiritual freedom. She renounces all her material possessions that might hold back her purification and redemption. Sendler declares that, “Margaret Drabble has long been considered a feminist writer, concerned almost exclusively with the inner lives of female characters and what some critics have referred to as the ‘female quest’”(Sendler,2005, p.5).

In fact, Rose is a divorced woman in her thirties; she lives with her three children in a poor “slum” in London during the 1960s. The atmosphere of the story reflects of the complexities of the working -class community in post-war British. Despite of her friends’ criticism of her place of residence, Rose refuses to change her house, preferring to live with social and moral integrity. She has her reasons for denying her inheritance and prominent class. After feeling unhappy and unsatisfied with her previous life, she wants to live an ordinary life, depending on herself. She finds her pleasure in shopping for herself, bringing up her children, and being sure that they are unspoiled and getting the best education in the ordinary public school.

Rose has spent an uneasy life with her parents, whom she feels disconnected from and unsatisfied with their artificial upper-class lifestyle. As a result, she chooses to build her independent life and to marry against their will. Thus, she marries a man of Greek origin named Christopher Vassiliou, who stands against her desire to dispose of her inheritance and believes that “the best” for them is to keep the money and live a comfortable life. While Rose finds “the best” for her and for the family is to get rid of her wealth and to give it as a charity to a schoolhouse in Africa. The contradiction in the moral codes between the couple results in their dramatic separation

Simon Camish marries a wealthy woman at the urging of his mother, who has suffered from the meanness of the lower-class life. Nevertheless, his marriage to Julie Philips, whom he thinks is a good girl of the upper- class, has not been a successful one, for he soon discovers the futility of running after wealth. Upon meeting Rose at a dinner party and giving her a lift that night, Simon finds what he has been searching for all his life, spiritual peace and psychological comfort. He thinks of Rose’s warmth “as a feeling in me, in my brain, in my heart, so dull, so cold, so persistent, so ancient, that I am growing fond of it”(Drabble,1972, p.14). Both, Rose and Simon, attempt to achieve what they are missing in their personal life. As a lawyer, Simon becomes involved in Rose’s complicated affair with her ex-husband when the latter decides to file a case of custody case of his children, a move that is part of Christopher’s plan to reconcile with his wife. Afterwards, Simon realizes that his love relationship with Rose is doomed to failure and they should remain friends. He “admits that he loves Rose, that he is unhappy in his marriage, but he encourages Rose to return to her abusive husband”(Lay,1984, p.33). Then, Rose decides to return to her former husband for the sake of their children, who are so happy with this reunion, as she

describes their feelings while on a picnic with their father: “They put down their burdens and the children capered off, running wildly, and they stood and stretched and smiled, and took off their boots, and felt the wet firm sand”(Drabble,1972, p.329). She is aware that if she goes on in her affair with Simon, it would be in opposition to her moral basis.

However, “some readers have been dissatisfied with the ending of Margaret Drabble’s novel”(Lay,1984, p.33). So Drabble herself sheds light on the resolution of her novel in an interview explaining that: “I wrote the whole of *The Needle’s Eye* while Clive and I were still together. And I might not have made it end as it did if we had separated first. I might have allowed [Rose] her freedom. I wonder”(Hardin,1973, p.277). On another occasion, she declares: “If I were to write *The Needle’s Eye* now, I would end it quite differently, but then, of course, it would have to be a different book right through”(Mannheimer,1975, p.30). Rose speaks to Simon about Christopher, saying,

“he lives just down the road from you. I took the liberty of looking you up in the phone book when I got worried about sending you off with all those documents, and I saw you lived just up the road from him. Odd, isn’t it?”(Drabble,1972, p.261)

After recovering her relation with Christopher, she feels a sense of guilt toward her parents, as she has been tough and stubborn. She blames herself for the tumultuous relationship with them. The omniscient narrator watches her attempts to,

“trace a more natural connection between herself and her parentage, discovering in herself her mother’s hypochondria with every sore throat, her father’s inhumanity with her own preference for the total as opposed to the individual. I, like him, she would say to herself, am stubborn beyond belief...”(Drabble,1972, p.309).

Rose has spent much of her life-time searching for her personal identity. Yet, by the end of the novel she has come to terms with her inner turmoil, as Drabble instructs her protagonist to sense that:

“She was settled now, and her nature, though it saddened her at times as it had done this evening, she had on the whole so accepted and understood that she felt she could look at its vagaries quite equally, she could watch it panicking over the choice between taxis and buses with something like a maternal amusement. She was what she was: she had learned to go along with it”(Drabble,1972, p.53).

“At the conclusion of *The Needle’s Eye*, there is a final moment of personal acceptance and psychological maturation for Rose”(Sendler, 2005, p.59), the omniscient narrator comments on her visit to the Alexandra Palace saying: “Mass-produced, it had been, but it had weathered into identity. And this, she hoped, for every human soul”(Drabble,1972, p.361).

Feeling burdened and suffocated by her material heritage, Rose courageously relieves herself from that burden and renounces all her wealth and possessions, preferring to live in poverty. She reflects on her decision saying: “It felt like a chain around my neck, and I had to break free”(Drabble,1972, p.169). She adheres to Christian teachings that warn against the love of wealth and harmonizes with the Islamic beliefs that stress the ephemeral nature of material possessions. In an interview with Drabble, she talks about Rose describing her life saying:

“I am focusing on the difficulties of leading a good life when we live in a world where social classes are divided, money is very important and Rose is trying to lead a good life which is difficult for rich people. It’s more difficult now than it was then. It was difficult then and she is trying to lead a simple life which is very difficult in modern times” (Nagamatsu, 2012, p.224).

Drabble adds saying:

“Well, she has a way of life that is not concentrated on material goods. And it’s not religious. In a sense she is a practicing believer, but she has a religion of self-denial in her community rather than in her of self-advancement” (Nagamatsu, 2012, p.224)

Rose tries to redeem herself from the prerogatives of her prior breeding and socialization. She confesses, “I wanted to be free of it all, free of the money, the expectations, the weight of it. It was like a chain around my neck”(Drabble, 1972, p.145). This powerful saying reminiscent of the Biblical statement: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1Timothy 6:10, The International Version, 2011.) and the Quranic reproach directed toward those who are obsessed by their wealth and children and forget their religious duties: “O ye who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own”(Surah Al-Munafiqun, 63:9. Ali, 1934). Furthermore, Rose chooses to live in an old-fashioned house in a working-class slum to release herself from the constraints of the upper-class. She feels more comfortable with her impoverished neighborhood to the extent that she describes her home as “a place where I could breathe, where I could be myself, away from the suffocating luxury of my old life”(Drabble,1972, p.140). This intrinsic transformation in Rose’s personality requires a fundamental reorientation of morality and great persistence. Her journey toward spiritual salvation mirrors how difficult it is to choose the righteous way in a modern, secular, and corrupted community. As Rose herself declares, “It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it. It was worth it to live a life that felt true, a life that felt real” (Drabble,1972,p.98). Her saying echoes the Quranic statement “And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to Our Ways”(Al-Ankabut,69. Ali, 1934). For her faith in religious morality and her elevated spirituality, Rose can play the role of a modern saint, particularly in the modern secular and materialistic society of London. Her search for spiritual salvation and moral integrity leads her to self-denial, as she clarifies to Simon, “I didn’t want to be rich. I didn’t want to be part of that world anymore. It felt like a betrayal of everything I believed in”(Drabble, 1972,p.75).This explanation reflects the Christian concept of “kenosis”(self-emptying) and the Islamic convention of “zuhd”(Shafi & Usmani, 2010), which means asceticism. The two dogmas confirm the principles of modesty, contentment, and satisfaction as ways to achieve self-enlightenment.

Rose’s moral integrity is reflected in her love for kind acts and generous help. She feels happy to offer charity to her poor neighbor: “It wasn’t much, just a few pounds, but it felt right. It felt like I was doing something meaningful for once”(Drabble,1972, p.78). Her noble behavior echoes the Biblical instruction to “give to the one who asks you” (Matthew 5:42) as well as “you cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24. The International Version, 2011.). Similarly, her charity conforms to the Islamic order to give money voluntarily, “sadaqa”(Shafi & Usmani, 2010) and obligatory charity, “zakat” (Shafi & Usmani, 2010). Rose is a woman of powerful faith with a truthful ability for transformation; therefore, Simon admires her when he says of her, “She was like a saint, but not the kind you read about in books. She was real, flawed, human. And that made her even more extraordinary” (Drabble, 1972, p.58). Simon, a few years older than Rose, is a too conventional figure, representing justice and law, which intersects with the privacy of Rose, who stands for peace, mercy, and love. Through the course of his relationship with Rose, Simon’s soul yearns greatly to be transformed into a more lofty sphere of nobility and morality. As the divine eye of the omniscient narrator observes: “He was a man caught between two worlds, the world of wealth and power and the world of faith and integrity. It was a struggle that would define him, a struggle that would ultimately lead him to redemption” (Drabble, 1972, p.79). He recognizes the corrupted vulnerabilities in himself and then makes his decision for change. His realization of the significance of selecting the right path of moral idealism reflects the Islamic principle of “tawbah” (Shafi & Usmani, 2010),which means repentance, as well as the Christian concept of

redemption through disillusionment and self-examination. This implies that “tawbah” or repentance is possible for all humans, even those who have been immersed in materialism. As Simon cynically confesses after his disillusionment: “I used to think that money was the answer to everything. It made sense, didn’t it? If you had money, you had power, security, respect” (Drabble, 1972, p.182). His admiration for Rose’s asceticism leads him to face the sterility of his own life and to reassess his preferences, so he declares saying: “She made me see things differently. She made me see that there was more to life than money, more than success. She made me want to be a better person” (Drabble, 1972, p.188). Knowing what is going on inside the character’s soul, the omniscient narrator comments on Simon’s inner conflict saying:

“With a faint sudden recurring shock of astonishment he would recognize, in his own behavior, an eternal human pattern of corruption. This is it, he would think to himself, this is I, doing what all men do, I am enacting those old and pre-ordained movements of the spirit, those ancient patterns of decay, I, who had thought myself different . . . He was caught. And his spirit would hunch its feathered bony shoulders, and grip its branch, and fold itself up and shrink within itself, until it could no longer brush against the net, until it could no longer entangle itself, painfully, in the surrounding circumstantial mesh” (Drabble, 1972, p.144).

Comparing himself and the people of his society to Rose, Simon realizes how the world in which he is living is corrupted, and this corruption is “ancient” (Drabble, 1972, p.138) and original in human life. His realization reflects the Quranic advice: “If thou obeyest most of those on earth, they will lead thee astray from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture; they do nothing but lie”(Surah Al-A’nam, 6:116. Ali, 1934). Simon starts his journey toward spiritual salvation hand in hand with Rose, initiating themselves by an eminent inquiry of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, a statement that Rose admires much, “What shall I do to be saved?” (Bunyan, 1678/2008, p.10) This is basically a Christian question that has become Pilgrim’s code, and later becomes Rose’s and Simon’s: “What shall I do to lead a good life? What does it mean to be good?” (Drabble, 1972, p.183). Rose and Simon’s spiritual journey is not an uncomplicated or straight one; on the contrary, it is a challenging task full of crosscurrents and obstacles. Their journey represents swimming against the current and passing through a narrow channel. Hence, “passing through the needle’s eye” is the most fitting symbol for their struggle and the best reflection of the impossibility of their mission, yet they succeed in navigating through complicated modern societal norms. Finally, Rose succeeds in changing Simon, as he himself admits to her: “You’ve changed me. I don’t know how, but you’ve shown me a different way to live” (Drabble, 1972, p.278). Self-sacrifice and self-denial are the most distinguished spiritual weapons they use to defy materialism, egoism, and class distinctions.

From the metaphor of “the needle’s eye”, Drabble derives an image of a gateway that leads to personal refinement. The protagonist, Rose, enters the gate bearing weight of sacrifices as a crucible for her ethical and moral integrity. She describes her inner conflict towards transformation as the symbolic passing through the eye of the needle; thus, she describes her personal transition from the past experiences of her upbringing to reconciliation with her downtrodden present life, remarking:

“I hated it at first, I hated it for years, but I believed in it, and now I love it. . . . All this, you see, I created it for myself. Stone by stone and step by step. I carved it out, I created it by faith, I believed in it, and then very slowly, it began to exist. And now it exists. It’s like God. It requires faith”(Drabble, 1972, p.56).

After finding her lost self, Rose challenges all the external oppositions and strives to stay on the right path. Her deliberate conduct echoes the Islamic principle that states staying on the Straight Path is not an easy task, yet it requires patience and self-examination. Attaining salvation and moral satisfaction

demands continuous self-recognition, so that the righteous person may stay in an ongoing struggle to resist his self-desires and worldly temptations. And this is exactly what happened to Rose, who remains uncertain and worried about her fate. She is neither part of the wealthy world she has lived in nor satisfied with her renunciation of wealth. She exemplifies a state of moral limbo, which is “a state of moral confusion or ambiguity, where an individual finds themselves in a situation where it is difficult to make a clear or decisive moral decision”(Oxford University Press, n.d.). The term limbo is originally Christian; it is usually used to denote a state in which people are neither fully sinful nor have been baptized nor have the chance for salvation(Catholic online, n.d.). Surah Al-A’raf 7:46-48 , recites:

“And the men on the Heights call out to men whom they know by their marks, saying: 'Of what profit to you were your forces and your arrogant ways?' 'Are these the ones whom you swore would never receive the mercy of Allah?' 'Enter you the Garden: no fear shall be on you, nor shall you grieve” (Ali, 1934).

The Quran describes a place known as Al-A’raf (The Heights) where the people’s souls are kept between Paradise and Hell waiting for their judgments. These souls remain in a state of doubt, for they are neither quietly righteous nor completely sinners, and in addition, they are neither entirely damned nor perfectly rescued. The people on The Heights ask the damned people of Hell about the benefit of their money and authority; they remind them how they have sworn that the believers in God would not enter Paradise! Then God allows the people of The Heights to enter God’s Garden. Moreover, He promises them that they will never feel sad or fear. In the same way, Rose is plagued by doubts and suspicions about whether she is in a state of perfect moral integrity or not. She is uncertain, unstable, and still in need of divine guidance, like all humans. She consciously embraces Christian ethical values; moreover, she instinctively epitomizes Islamic dogmas. Throughout the events of the novel, Rose tries to succeed in balancing her divine devotion and religious faith with worldly duties and responsibilities.

Christopher Vassiliou, Rose’s ex-husband, is regarded as her foil. Even though Rose has chosen him and loved him for his simple and humble background, he is not at ease with his reality. He has experienced poverty and deprivation, so he hates being a poor peasant from a disadvantaged immigrant family. He loves wealth and thinks it does not conflict with public morals. He marries Rose, a wealthy heiress from the upper class, to elevate his social status and improve his living standards. That is why, he launches a war of verbal and physical abuses against her when she decides to free herself and her family from material possessions, a war that leads the couple to a heartbreaking divorce.

The Needle’s Eye sheds light on the conflict between religious faith and the infidelity that governs the modern world. Rose’s idealistic strategy of adopting religious values causes her a great deal of difficulty in aligning with Christopher's expectations that are typical of the modern materialistic urban lifestyle. The novel suggests that Christian faith and ethics of a Christian community should be evaluated through the individuals’ conduct and manners, which constitute a broader societal and cultural setting. The novel indirectly includes intertextual allusions to Islamic philosophy. The story in Surah Al-A’raf 7:175-176 tells: “Recite to them the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he detached himself from them, so Satan pursued him, and he became one of the misguided” (Ali, 1934). The details of the person exemplified in this Quranic parable correspond to the character of Christopher, who insists on his love and dedication to money and wealth despite knowing its dangers in corrupting the individual and the whole society. Although, Rose tries her best to warn him of the risks of his materialistic thinking, he is unable to change his devotion to wealth and sacrifices his marriage instead. He becomes like the stubborn person in Surah Al-A’raf who ignores the Divine instruction and chooses to pursue his self-desires, so Satan controls him and he turns to be one of the misled. On the contrary, Rose guides herself toward the right and struggles to fulfill her goal despite all her doubts. Her spiritual journey aligns with the Islamic concept of “fitnah” (Shafi & Usmani, 2010), which refers to a trial or temptation used to

test an individual's religious faith and resistance in the face of worldly temptations, including wealth and privilege.

Despite Christopher's moral imperfections and contradictions, Rose finally decides to return to him, and Simon encourages the reunion of the couple. Both Rose and Simon sacrifice their love and their life together for the sake of family integration and the children's emotional stability. For Rose, family ties are sacred, as comes in the Bible; as part of the indirect religious intertextuality on which Drabble has built her novel, (1 Timothy 5:8): "Anyone does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever", and (Galatians 6:2) "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ" (The International Version, 2011). These verses urge the members of the family to love and support each other in order to keep the family bonds tight. Likewise, many Quran instructions guide people to respect family relationships. It comes in Surah An-Nisa 4:19: "On the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good"(Ali, 1934). Rose's self-denial is not only evident in her renunciation of her inheritance but also in her relinquishing of her love and happiness, Simon, and reuniting with her estranged husband, Christopher, whom the omniscient narrator expresses Rose's feelings, stating that: "She had seen her soul, suddenly, as she spoke; it was dark and crying and bloody, like a bat or an embryo, and it was not very nice at all, not an agreeable thing, and it flapped and squeaked inside her angrily whenever Christopher touched or spoke to her"(Drabble,1972, p.423). Simon, too, shares with Rose her sacrifice of love when he suggests that she breaks up with him and returns to her prior husband on behalf of family integration. Their giving up the love of their lives and adhering to virtuous morality demonstrate their spiritual elegance, which results from their Divine devotion.

Margaret Drabble uses the technique of the omniscient narrator to explore her religious theme. In fact, this technique possesses several features that surpass those of other narrative techniques. It has great advantages for coordinating smoothly with the task of revealing the characters' morality, faith, and inner struggle. As Rimmon-Kenan indicates: "The omniscient narrator can provide insight into the human condition, revealing the inner lives and motivations of the characters, and thus creating a nuanced and complex portrait of human nature" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p.101).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "omniscience" as "an attribute of the author or a third-person narrator: a full and complete knowledge concerning all the events of a narrative, and the private motives, thoughts, etc. of all the characters"(Oxford University Press, n.d.). Meir Sternberg describes the omniscient narrator as having superhuman knowledge. He claims that the "author-god analogy" is of great significance to the theory of the omniscient narrator. Sternberg argues that,

"humans have always easily coped with omniscient narrative, because the divine model and its previous literary instantiations have supplied them with all the epistemic know-how necessary for the purpose. They know all that they need to know, in the appropriate, pattern-(re)constructive sense of knowledge"(Sternberg, 2007, p.728).

The third-person omniscient point of view is a literary narration technique that presents an omniscient perspective and all-seeing insight into the character's psyche and worldview (White, 2020). The omniscient voice can know what happened, what is happening, and what will happen with no limitation in space or time, in addition to knowing what each character is thinking and how he will behave. Secondly "because it so paradoxically manages to align itself against the public world and with the private, even as it reveals private affairs to the public eye" (Jaffe, 1991, p.73).

"The Needle's Eye, which was first published in 1972 and is set a few years earlier. Intricately plotted,

rich in compelling characters, it's told in a dense, seductive, omniscient voice that beautifully balances inner and outer lives" (Oates,1972, p.25)

Hence, Margaret Drabble's use of the omniscient narrator perspective clarifies the wide gap between religious ideology and mundane morality. This narrative technique helps reveal the inner conflicts of the characters and predicts future events. Additionally, Drabble's use of an omniscient narrator deepens the religious themes of the novel, since it can reflect the Divine omniscient ability manifested in the Bible and the Quran. Valerie Myotte comments on Drabble's employment of this technique, explaining that it permits her "to weave a tapestry of moral introspection, where characters' inner lives are juxtaposed against societal dogma"(Myotte, 2010, p.45). In the same context, David Lodge declares that the omniscient narrator's role inheres in "maintaining an analytical distance, enabling readers to evaluate the protagonists' choices without partisan bias"(Lodge,1992, p.120). The omniscient narrator puts the novel's protagonists, Rose Vassiliou and Simon Camish, under the microscope, so their personal life and private experiences are generalized to take on broader social and ethical dimensions. Rose's inner struggle between her religious beliefs and social traditions is disclosed through the omniscient narrator. She has been ready to give up her fortune for the sake of following her internal call for religious duty. The narrator highlights the heroine's pure conscience and spiritual journey, reflecting the way of her thinking: "She had chosen poverty as others choose luxury, with a kind of defiant pride, but the consequences were not what she had anticipated"(Drabble,1972, p.67). Rose's characteristics as a moralist are emphasized by means of the omniscient narrator, who allows the reader to comprehend a comprehensive perspective, as Frye writes: "The omniscient narrator can create a sense of cosmic order, in which the characters and events are seen as part of a larger divine plan, and in which the reader is invited to share in the narrator's divine perspective"(Frye, 1957, p.136).

To explore Simon Camish's ambiguity, the divine eye of the omniscient narrator becomes a necessity. Simon's psychology is more complicated than that of Rose, for he undergoes an internal conflict between spirituality and materialism. He passes through several stages of moral contrasts that lead to his final disillusionment and satisfaction in order to reconcile with Rose's world. As the narrator notices: "He admired her, yet he could not believe in her. Her sacrifices seemed to him a form of arrogance, a refusal to engage with the real world"(Drabble,1972,p.122). The narrator's revelation of Simon's journey towards redemption renders him a societal guide for spirituality.

By virtue of the third person omniscient narration, Drabble succeeds in enhancing the depth of her religious theme, and generalizes her critique to cover the whole ethical system of society, as the narrator concludes in this statement: "The world demanded compromise, yet sanctity lay in refusal—a paradox that left both Rose and Simon stranded in their separate ways"(Drabble,1972, p.189). This narrative strategy establishes a direct bridge of dialogue between the characters' inner insight and the reader's conscious perception. Additionally, it invites readers to choose their way toward integrity and righteousness.

Conclusion

One of the major advantages of intertextuality in literature is that supplements themes and strengthens meanings. In a literary work, layers of meanings and complex characterization are evoked through dialogue with previous texts. A single reference from a previous text is enough to evoke new emotions and perspectives in the new text (Kristeva,1966).

In *The Needle's Eye*, intertextuality plays an influential role, for it attaches further thematic dimensions to the novel. Consequently, in addition to the novels' apparent themes such as materialism, family relationships, feminism, social hierarchy, economic inequality, and the post-war modern secular world;

intertextuality greatly accentuates the religious themes. The direct reference to the Bible and the allusion to the Quran through the novel's title and the metaphor of "the camel passing through the needle's eye" stress its enduring applicability of the novel's moral lessons.

Academically, intertextuality helps turn *The Needle's Eye* into an important subject for initiating universal religious negotiations and observations. Generally, intertextuality links the novel directly and indirectly to a larger sphere of cultural, traditional, and historical backgrounds, placing the novel's themes and characters within a broader human context (Barthes, 1977). This intertextuality demonstrates its ability to unite diverse religious traditions, such as Christianity and Islam, and also to foster harmony between individuals from different social classes, as seen in the relationship between Rose and Simon, and ultimately, Rose and Christopher. These harmonious reconciliations suggest the possibility of integrating individuals of paradoxical personalities if they adhere to religious moral teachings. In fact, the intertextual Biblical and Quranic references and allusions in *The Needle's Eye* urge knowledgeable readers to consider ethical standards seriously, and encourage them to explore new meanings so they may experience a kind of satisfaction and reward (Riffaterre, 1978).

Furthermore, intelligent readers interact spiritually and emotionally with the cultural and traditional backgrounds of the original texts from which intertextuality is extracted. In *The Needle's Eye*, readers communicate with the moral teachings of the Bible and the Quran and are prompted to investigate more in religious domains. Books that include references from holy and valuable texts, such as the Bible and the Quran, are regarded as sources of inspiration for guidance, faith and reform. The traditions of both religions, Christianity and Islam, emphasize the dangers of materialism, advocate for ethical obligation, and demonstrate the necessity of choosing noble values despite the hardships of such a choice in modern society, where religious faith is often subjective and depends on personal preferences.

References to stories from the Bible and the Quran create parallels to the novel's main and subplots (Genette, 1997). Rose's journey toward spirituality and morality is a profound reflection of the Bible's teachings. In Jesus' parable of the wealthy man who asks him about the possibility of attaining salvation, Jesus replied that a rich man cannot enter God's Kingdom unless the camel passes through the eye of the needle; painfully, the rich man departs, unwilling to get rid of his material possessions. Likewise, the Quran in Surah Al-A'raf warns the faithful worshippers against arrogance and hypocrisy and points out the impossibility for the unfaithful, arrogant, and hypocritical to attain Paradise.

Intertextuality effectively enhances characterization and reveals the characters' inner worlds (Bakhtin, 1981). Rose's quotation from the Bible reflects her religious tendency and her desire to follow Jesus' instruction. Her inner conflict between fulfilling her desire and her external struggle with the community informs the reader of the difficulty of her moral mission. In the same context, Simon's inner conflict to achieve moral integrity and his transformation from materialistic enslavement to spiritual enlightenment echo Christian and Islamic principles. Christopher's psyche represents the stubborn ones who, despite knowing the correct path, insist on choosing the wrong one. They are the misdirected who prefer materialistic mundane comfort.

The omniscient narrator is the most effective narrative strategy employed by Drabble to reveal the characters' inner worlds and psychological conflicts. The third-person divine eye observes carefully every action that happens in the novel and accurately conveys the characters' feelings to the readers. "As the omniscient narrator can see into the hearts and minds of all characters, he can provide a comprehensive and authoritative view of the story, much like a divine being" (Abrams, 1999, p.234).

Many literary critics associate the omniscient narrator with religious themes, among them is Booth, who says: "The omniscient narrator can provide a running commentary on the action, and can thus be

used to convey the author's views on moral and religious questions"(Booth, 1961, p.163). Consequently, this technique of narration is used successfully by Drabble in *The Needle's Eye* side by side with intertextuality, to help communicate her religious message most effectively.

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