

## Embodying Ambiguity: Water and Ice in YA Fantasy

In Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows* and *Crooked Kingdom* duology, there is an underlying tension between water and ice. Encapsulated in a Fjerdan saying, "The water hears and understands. The ice does not forgive" (*Six of Crows* 253), water/ice appears to offer a binary opposition between that which is fluid and that which is solid. Moreover, this opposition speaks to several oppositional categories running throughout the novels: "Grisha" (magically gifted)/not; "merch" (merchant)/Dreg (gang member, living in the Barrel); free/indentured (slave), muddy/pure. However, in typical YA fashion opposition is complicated. Water may hear and understand, but it is also hungry and potentially destructive. Ice may be unforgiving but it is also penetrable, and it may become water once again.

This paper argues that, rather than binarily opposed, water and ice exist on a continuum of relation and that this continuum speaks to a defining characteristic of YA. After first exploring the obvious and 'simple' articulation of water and ice, this paper will consider how the two categories are more related than they appear. In this way, this paper considers water a 'trickster' element, one that takes on properties and disrupts expectations. Crucially, this disruptive aspect features, admittedly differently, through all of water's states: gas, liquid, solid. Each state offers a particular ambiguity, thus linking each – despite attempts to separate them. Finally, this paper will argue that water's liminality is a characteristic of YA. While Bardugo's duology is key to this reading, the paper will reference more widely to support its claim – that liminality, rather than opposition, is key to both understanding the role of water (and ice) in young adult fiction, as well as how liminality defines YA.