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The *Bildungsroman* Transformed Magic, Memories, and the Unpredictable Movements of Growth in Young Adult Speculative Fiction

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THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* TRANSFORMED: MAGIC, MEMORIES, AND THE
UNPREDICTABLE MOVEMENTS OF GROWTH IN YOUNG ADULT SPECULATIVE
FICTION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
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ABSTRACT

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BY: MIRÓ JUSTAD

This thesis reconsiders the classic *Bildungsroman* coming-of-age narrative by looking at contemporary Young Adult speculative novels *Legenborn* by Tracy Deonn and *Six Crimson Cranes* by Elizabeth Lim. Unlike the White male protagonist which the classic *Bildungsroman* centers around, these novels feature young women of color who, discover within a speculative genre, that they have magical capabilities. This thesis traces various directions of growth that complicate the idea of “growing up” by looking for moments that expose the characters as looking backwards within their memories, moving through time and space in unanticipated ways aided by magic, accessing a multitude of “selves” within, and making negotiations between their interior and exterior world. This paper will suggest that instead of following a linear coming-of-age trajectory, growth emerges in the texts as entangled, spontaneous, unpredictable, and inscrutable. In this case, the *Bildungsroman* provides a narrative structure to talk back to, or look around. I argue that these movements are made by a fragmented collection of “selves” that the protagonists embody, granting them an elusive quality, making their identities hard to categorize. The *Bildungsroman* classically follows a White heterosexual male character as they leave the shelter of home and integrate into society. My thesis intentionally shifts away from this model by reconsidering this narrative when it is applied to marginalized subjects and intervened

by the presence of magic. In the end, my thesis argues that these protagonists evade static endings when we reconfigure the *Bildungsroman* as spontaneous, relational, and never ending, granting the characters potential and agency rather than assigning them a specific role in society. Here, I evade linearity in my own writing by discussing opinions within the footnotes and bringing poetry into each section to willfully undermine a voice of scholarly authority. Inspired by feminist writers who infuse their work with vulnerability and embodied approaches to the text, I delve into lived-experiences to express the fact that like these protagonists, my own personhood has stakes in how we reconfigure the *Bildungsroman*.

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Introduction

i return to myself here – knees bruising on the hardwood floor
 pulling the thick black volume off a cluttered shelf
 magic beckons, gestures, reaches for something intangible–
 yet here it rests solidly in my hands¹

As I write this, I am sitting at the small desk in my bedroom which faces West.² To my left is a white bookshelf holding some of the most precious items from my youth; I can see *The Books of Pellinor* by Alison Croggon with their food-splattered margins decorated with poetry of mine from over the years, the *Abhorsen Trilogy* by Garth Nix that introduced me to dark monsters and heavy ideas about death and the afterlife in grade school, and the *Uglies* series by Scott Westerfield which provided me my first glimpse of a dystopian speculative future among others. Over the years this section has continued to grow simultaneously with my pile of academic books and more “serious” forms of literature. I can *feel* the presence of these fantastical books in my most intimate interior spaces like small portals beckoning me to merge their speculative worlds with the one I reside in.

In the early 2000s, the YA section at my local Barnes & Noble was filled mostly with heterosexual White women as the leads—like in all of the series mentioned above—crusading

¹ Poems will accompany each section of the thesis, providing a more humanistic creative dimension to the scholarship.

² Here I follow in a tradition of feminist scholarship that centers an embodied learning experience. Throughout my work, I will provide personal anecdotes relating to my life in attempts to provide more intimacy between myself and the readers, carving out vulnerable spaces and invoking community.

against the patriarchy and using their tough grit and ingenuity to navigate a racially homogenous world. YA speculative novels were my first encounter with feminism that did not come from my parents; an identity-forming experience that happened within the warmth of my twin-sized bed. In these moments, I witnessed magic empowering a straight White woman protagonist, who played an underdog role, becoming a variation of “the chosen one.” At the time, I was unaware of how these narratives molded with my own desires to grow up as an individual pitted against the world. Today, I question what kinds of colonialist desires were instilled within me; In general, the *Bildungsroman*,³ a coming-of-age literary genre, can often play out as an individualistic grab for more power that can appear as a pathway of rebellion against preexisting social hierarchies, yet nevertheless, that rebellion becomes quelled as one matures and falls into their assigned role in social life. In this coming-of-age framework, “growing up” becomes synonymous with accepting social norms, like falling into monogamous relationships and becoming a productive worker.⁴

³ Tobias Boes writes of the original *Bildungsroman*: “This honor [of inventing the *Bildungsroman*] belongs...to Karl Morgenstern (1770-1852), a professor of aesthetics at the University of Dorpat...Morgenstern’s investigation into the nature of the developmental novel...remains significant...For him, in other words, the *Bildungsroman* gazes not inward, at the development of its fictional protagonist, but outward, into the real world and toward the development of its audience” (Boes 647-8).

⁴ I do not want to be reductive in my claims about the YA speculative fiction tradition; many of those novels from the 1990s and 2000s taught me about feminism and about honoring your inner-voice. They often critiqued capitalism and institutional power as well, but failed to be intersectional in terms of race and gender amongst other factors. But also, as a young Asian American woman I did not realize that my own identity was so far in the peripheral vision of these worlds that I was reading from the standpoint as an exotic “other.”

In recent years, the YA speculative section at my local bookstore has started to look different; the kinds of books featured on the shelves have shifted in appearance and content.⁵ A new wave of YA speculative fiction books I see today have juicy dark covers depicting fierce figures of young people of color. As I browse their descriptions, I notice the issues that these young protagonists face are increasingly more complex in their intersectionality (racism, sexism, ableism, environmentalism can be found in the plot-structure of a single text), and as a result, are explicitly rebellious and critical of society.

Considering the linear narrative of the classic *Bildungsroman*, I will explore how YA speculative novels *Legendborn* (2020) by Tracy Deonn and *Six Crimson Cranes* (2021) by Elizabeth Lim push upon that original model, and ultimately bypass it. Both are written by authors of color and feature young women of color, whose development seem to be chaotically intertwined with the impossibility of magic, allowing for them to shape shift and bend normative understandings of time and place. *Legendborn*'s leading character, sixteen-year-old Bree, and *Six Crimson Cranes*' sixteen-year-old protagonist Shiori, constantly negotiate their ways through speculative worlds where considerations of their race and gender are presented as always embedded within the narrative perspective. Bree and Shiori's identities do not merely replace the White heterosexual identity in these stories about growing up—instead the *Bildungsroman* as a genre is in itself reconfigured through these women of color protagonists, with their desires and movements. I will continue to use the *Bildungsroman* as a reference point from which we can

⁵ I remember visiting small cramped bookstores that smelled like worn-out paper with my parents when I was a kid and looking down aisles of paperbacks and cds and posters. This ritual shifted into visiting big corporate bookstore chains, and then shifted again as even Barnes and Nobles became obscure. Today I find myself browsing at the few small bookshops or larger bookstores left that feel like outposts of a fading tactile reading world.

work through and against, and start feeling out different shapes of growth, and what it means to complete (or not complete) a coming-of-age trajectory.

Throughout my project I will be looking at elements of the texts that amplify the kinds of growth movements which defy the ability to place a linear model of “progress” upon the coming-of-age narrative. Specifically, I will be tracking how interactions with memories and magic, as intertwined, illuminate a subtle gesture towards a trajectory of development which cannot be defined by one narrative shape; taking us forward, backwards, inwards, outwards, and beyond. “Growth” can be defined by the shifting and evolving multitude of selves within the protagonists and the deepening of interconnectivity which they experience with their world, their memories, and their past, present, and future.

Bree’s coming-of-age experience as an African American woman in the United States comes with challenges specific to her racial identity and gender while Shiori, a princess whose exact race is not-explicitly mentioned in the text but is purportedly East Asian, mainly faces obstacles of gender.⁶ I put Shiori and Bree and their different *Bildungsroman* trajectories into conversation with one another to present a more nuanced understanding of the coming-of-age narrative rather than to simply compare them side by side as static characters. In *Six Crimson Cranes* which is a retelling of Hans Christian Anderson’s 1838 fairytale *Wild Swans*, Shiori discovers that she possesses forbidden magical powers that manifest both within her as well as in the form of a paper crane. Shiori and her brothers become cursed and banished from their kingdom and are scattered across the land as her stepmother’s secret identity surfaces allegedly

⁶ Reading *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* as containing the flexible movements of a recontextualized *Bildungsroman* opens us up and confirms the diversity of lived experiences. This confirmation of infinite ways of being, allows the texts to hold within them restorative properties for marginalized readers who might not be recognizable in the older YA speculative works.

as an evil sorceress. While the magical plots play out, she also begins to fall in love with a man who she had claimed she could never belong with and also falls in love with a magical boy who is half-dragon. Significantly, most of the pivotal scenes of discovery and growth take place within Shiori's memories; past events converge with her present life pulling her character into different directions. These memories are triggered while Shiori is cognizant and awake, suggesting that even when we believe that we are fully present in the moment, we are in fact constantly diverging from that sense of clarity.

I am interested in the kinds of motion which occur between the interior self and the exterior world during the immersive reading experience YA speculative fiction affords that is also reflected in the life of these protagonists. In the footnotes I will share moments of my own immersion within the texts and feelings that they evoke within me. The back-and-forth, twisting path of reading and remembering that defies linear time and the stability of place highlights the unpredictable shapes of personal growth, which are affected by how we explore our own memories, and amplifies the intertwining web of external and internal experiences that become a part of our personal narratives. During a summer I spent in Mexico City, I remember laying on my back reading Lim's novel from cover to cover while the outside noises careened around the apartment building, totally absorbed in a fantastical kingdom filled with its own sounds and rhythms that melded into the muggy afternoon. My memory of that summer day is of underwater dragons and snake-faced sorceresses entangled with the warm thunderstorm which held the bustling city in suspension before the raindrops steamed our windows and the bar crowds spilled back onto its sidewalks. This enmeshment of Shiori's magical journey and my own, away from my own bedroom, touches upon a quality of YA speculative fiction that blurs lines between the reality in front of me, and the world I enter into within fantastical narratives. Just as the

protagonists move through a collage of past, present, and future memories and imaginings, my own waking life is colored by the speculative worlds of the novels.

As I read *Legendborn* I remember the weight of its thickly bound pages bumping around in my backpack while I walked around UCLA's campus. It was like I had one foot on the college cement pathways, and another in Bree's fictional world that takes place at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After the loss of her mother, Bree leaves home and attends an early college program where she finds herself torn between a magical war between Arthurian legends and demons. As Bree starts to investigate her mother's death, she discovers that she has magic in her blood stemming from her mother's lineage, as well as from King Arthur's bloodline. *Legendborn* consumed my imagination—I pictured powerful demons crawling out from the underworld and magical powers stemming from Bree's enslaved ancestor's "rootcraft" wielded at the same time as Arthurian legends came to life carrying with them the powers of "bloodcraft." I point to this moment of immersion, which took place while I was not even actively reading the book, because it illuminates how reading can hold everyday life in its captivating grasp, thus blurring realities continuously until you are released from its plot. My participation in Bree's adventure as a reader did not feel totally passive; I *felt* Bree's anger towards the elderly racist White members of the Arthurian secret society who felt uncomfortable with her presence. I related to those feelings of discomfort, which during my teenage years, I did not have the vocabulary to name. Perhaps if the novels I read as a young girl called racism and sexism for what it was I would have had more agency in my own life to do so. The small space wedged between realities that a reader straddles is urgently important; as I feel the agency of magic in Bree and Shiori's hands and catch a moment's relief from the endless cycle of traumatic and tragic events in the present moment, I feel like I am tapping into a *different* narrative which

might give me a new set of tools and lenses to perceive the structural inequality within the world I live in now. Walking through campus with Bree in my bag and resting on my back in another country following Shiori's attempts to break her curse are both experiences that contain a multitude of malleable pathways for both myself and the text.

In *Legendborn* Deonn infuses her text with fantastical space and time-bending, suggesting that our world can be imagined as mutable, unstable, and full of potential.⁷ As Bree time travels through her ancestor's memories leading back to the time of U.S. slavery, we witness her growth occur as the narrative focuses on memories and shared interior spaces with people who died many years before her. Again, I am interested in the movements which are happening while reading speculative YA stories; immersive motions that take us inwards, external motions that project magic and possibility upon our reality, the act of turning backwards to grow around our memories, expanding and deepening with themes of grief and love.

Both Shiori and Bree are growing up while harboring the depths of their grief from each losing their mother. Something vital trails behind their mothers' departures, which enacts the *Bildungsroman* founded upon loss. The ways that they connect with their loss through uncovering buried memories of themselves and their mother figures become woven into their

⁷ Time travel for a person of color is interesting to consider since we often think of nostalgia for the past as generally favoring a White experience because conditions for marginalized people have continued to progress overtime. When Bree time travels with her guide (her on-campus therapist who is gifted with rootcraft) she tracks a historical narrative through the eyes of African American women mostly unhindered by the White colonialist gaze; the White European narrative here exists in the periphery of the experience and time travel becomes a restorative practice full of wisdom and power passed down amongst women. Time travel in *Legendborn* also puts ideas of forward moving progress into question as Bree in the present time is needing the powers of rootcraft to face White supremacy just as her ancestors did in another era.

development; “growing up” becomes complicated by the movement of “looking backwards” or “searching inwards” at one’s past from different vantage points.⁸ Grief and trauma open up a multitude of inner-selves within Bree and Shiori exemplified by Bree’s self-proclaimed “After Bree,” the young woman who emerges within her after her mother’s fatal accident. Bree’s mother was purportedly killed in a hit-and-run car crash, but as the plot unfolds, Bree begins to suspect that her death was caused by magic and then covered up.

Here, I look at the themes of magic and memories to uncover the ways they enact those movements which reshape the *Bildungsroman* trajectory from linear, to unpredictable and varied. Magic, I argue, helps us to imagine the protagonist’s self as being many selves which are making fragmented movements, as well as facilitates a vision of the protagonist as enmeshed within their environment making development a less individual, more communal project. Framing memories as sites of growth will allow us to comprehend how grief and love pushes on the stability of linear time and the fixedness of place. The tradition of YA speculative fiction takes on a new identity of resistance and offers restorative healing qualities for the reader as the genre is transformed by centering around marginalized experiences. Magic and memories aid us in reframing growth and provide us with a certain level of detachment from reality and providing us mental relief from the pervasive presence of society’s normative social structures as well as tools of resistance. YA speculative fiction’s care for the reader manifests in this relief because it emboldens us to imagine the impossible, to rest in a space of the unknown, to absorb the freeing

⁸ As a young woman who had also lost her mother early in life, I can recall facing challenges in life without her and having to rely on my memory of her to imagine what she might have advised me to do. It is like the real voice of my mother was lost, but an internalized imagining of her motherly advice and of our relationship never stopped growing and morphing in its shape. In some of the poetry that I use like epigraphs for each section I play with this imagined motherly voice.

creativity of outlandish ideas. In *Six Crimson Cranes* Shiori marvels at her secret magical pal, the paper crane Kiki, “Kiki was *my* paper bird. With my brothers growing older and always occupied with princely duties, I had been lonely. But Kiki listened to me and kept my secrets, and she made me laugh. Every day, she became more alive. She was my friend” (Lim 7). There is something urgently vital when the fantastic invokes rebellion and puts pressure on the limitations of our desires. Shiori’s magical bird who contains a piece of her soul might inspire us to understand our own identities as multifaceted and full of potential *because* of our complexity.

Literature Review

if i slip up, stare back too far
 i move through a ghostly town
 red rock blue sky child-sized palms grab—

my breath catches, i reach for coffee
 i hope it takes me forward i cannot afford to slip into—
 that evening as i falter between worlds the blanket grows taller
 deeper becomes the canyon, warm tears Strictly Ballroom closing scene music eerie sound
 i rotate backwards into cinematic sunsets grasping for the edges of this bed

i might have stretched through the years of slippage
 red rock blue sky warmed my cheek leaving it permanently rosy
 the deepest vision of my selves collide and then solidify and then sway
 i waken, eyes fluttering butterflies holding thick drops of sunlight⁹

In order to reshape our concepts about the *Bildungsroman*, I need to look at what other literature thinks critically about its schema. In their work on the *Bildungsroman*, Kaisa Ilmonen writes, “The genre of the *Bildungsroman* is closely connected to the tradition of the modern, its

⁹ This poem plays with the slippage that happens between worlds as I slip in and out of sleep as well as in and out of memories and also as I read YA literature. The “ghostly town” is referring to the inner eye’s ability to map memories and desires onto the present landscape which I can see while moving through the urban landscape of my home, Los Angeles. At the same time, the “red rock blue sky” refers to my early childhood trips to the Southwest and infuses the poem with multiple layers of time as well as emotional layers of nostalgia and grief. I wanted the poem to contain many movements like “stare back” “forward” “falter” “rotate backwards” “sway” and other moments of instability to amplify my thoughts about an unpredictable and varied growth trajectory that the *Bildungsroman* arguably contains.

plot line highlighting the developing ‘I’ emancipating itself as a true subject of humanist freedom. It is a genre that emerged in part as the manifestation of an individualistic, modern self...” (Llmonen 63). Llmonen touches on the basic framework of the *Bildungsroman* genre as derived from German scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries, which she then pushes back upon when considering Caribbean literature by female authors from the 1980s whose narratives made the singular “I” harder to distinguish in a coming-of-age narrative. The political context of the Caribbean in the 1980s is different from Bree’s 2020 United States setting or Shiori’s seemingly uncolonized pre-industrial Kingdom of Katana, yet they share thematic similarities to the stories which Llmonen analyzes. Llmonen argues,

The personal and the political became intertwined, the ‘self’ was seen more as a process constituted through a social/cultural context... Mothers and grandmothers were often constructed as bearers of a repressed past; daughters were presented as alienated seekers, or as heroines who were capable of finding the grandmother’s voice symbolizing resistance (Llmonen 63).

Llmonen’s consideration of growth as impacted by the relationship between a protagonist and their parental figures (in this case, a daughter’s mother and grandmother) is an entry point from which I approach *Legendborn* and *Six Crimson Cranes*. At the center of both novels, Bree and Shiori are on intimate quests to better understand how their own missing mothers and ancestors are situated within their changing world. The experiences of multiple generations map onto one another making it difficult to always distinguish the protagonist’s desires from those of their lineage. The individual “I” becomes complicated by the different selves which emerge in the context of these relationships and this is important to my work; the idea of growth does not necessarily equate to a solidifying self.

In my pursuit to track growth in *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* I have continuously run into moments where the idea of abandoning the old linear model of the *Bildungsroman*

seems redundant, even obvious at times. Yet in this work of pushing back against the *Bildungsroman*, I am able to hint at a shape of growth that is legible by its resistance to the rigid linearity of the classic coming-of-age narrative. In this way, looking at an existing narrative model is extremely helpful because the distance that emerges between this new configuration and its narrative conventions demonstrates the nuances and complexities that pull us in a new direction. Maria Karafilis defines the classic *Bildungsroman* as referring to “a specific type of novel written in a specific nation at a specific point in time (Germany in the late 18th century). It is a novel that relates the development of a (male) protagonist who matures through a process of acculturation and ultimately attains harmony with his surrounding society” (Karafilis 63). In this description we can trace a narrative desire to reach an “equilibrium” between the protagonist and their society, notably implying an acceptance or surrender to that society.¹⁰ Yet, the kind of harmony possible for people of color or anyone from a marginalized group is very different than for a hetero-sexual White protagonist. I am not suggesting that harmony is not possible for Bree and Shiori, but rather that it looks radically different for them—equilibrium becomes defined by the *process* of moving forwards, backwards, inwards, and outwards rather than only forwards

¹⁰ Carol Lazzaro-Weis offers us a feminist perspective on the *Bildungsroman* in “The Female 'Bildungsroman': Calling It into Question”: “When the term [Bildungsroman] entered the ranks of feminist criticism in the 1970s, it proved most useful in analyzing the ways in which nineteenth- and early twentieth -century women novelists had represented the suppression and defeat of female autonomy, creativity, and maturity by patriarchal gender norms. According to Annis Pratt, the female *Bildungsroman* demonstrates how society provides women with models of ‘growing down’ instead of ‘growing up,’ as is the case in the male model” (Lazzaro-Weis 17). Lazzaro-Weis adds to this conversation surrounding the directions of growth by drawing on older feminist critiques of it (although Lazzaro-Weis’ article is also dated—from the 1990s).

and towards some static conclusion. Or, maybe the idea of reaching an equilibrium is not the pursuit of these texts that seek to do something different than that of the classic *Bildungsroman*.

By resituating our desires for what an equilibrium looks like in the YA speculative *Bildungsroman*, we can locate a feeling of resolution within the chaotic entanglement of a character who grows in every which way. I want to read Bree and Shiori as ultimately searching for resolutions that ripple throughout their internal and external lives and the murky space in between where speculation and realities converge.¹¹ We might desire for a young female-identifying character to find love *and also* continue to redefine what home looks like over and over again as they develop—rather than “settle down” in a way that would conclude their movement. Jane Austen’s *Emma* is an example of a text that questions the *Bildungsroman* for women but also fulfills its classic desire to have the female protagonist “dealt with” in a way that concludes her spiritual growth. Emma’s ending ties a neat bow around a marriage to Mr. Knightly, a union which arguably pushes her into a box at the end where we can assume the rest of her story. Meanwhile, George Elliot’s character Dorothea in *Middlemarch* seems to challenge the classic *Bildungsroman* by having her play out the marriage narrative early in the text and end the novel in a state of movement; she leaves her community rather than settles in one. Dorothea’s

¹¹ Ymitri Mathison in *Growing Up Asian American In Young Adult Fiction* aptly touches on this narrative trope of tragedy and hardship that we see too often surrounding young people of color: “Most YA fiction written by authors of color, especially Asian American YA fiction, adheres to the tradition, Eurocentric bildungsroman plot...even as its authors reimagine this plot structure to reflect the realities of Asian American experiences. Such experiences often include the realities of immigration and poverty, rather than what critics have identified as the traditional white, middle-class, pastoral experience” (Mathison 6). Mathison points towards a certain tradition within YA fiction that I believe Lim and Deonn are effectively breaking out of. This is not to ignore the real systemic obstacles their protagonists would face in the real world, but I think that there are different ways of dealing with this subject matter that provides readers a sense of complexity when it comes to identity.

non-ending intrigues me as it offers her character an inscrutable future that protects her possibilities from dying out upon the pages.

Beyond a reactionary stance, I want this reshaping of the *Bildungsroman* to look *around* the original model as well, to root itself in a tradition that is difficult to place. What I propose is that the growth of Bree and Shiori constantly unravels in shapes that are inscrutable as they continuously and spontaneously return to memories and glimpse their past experiences through shifting perspectives. Rather than “growing up”¹² they are just “growing” in whatever direction they are pulled. The “pull” could be the needs of those around them and the unexpected demands of life, or it could be their own longings. A clear example of this interconnected pulling is how the intentions of Bree and Shiori’s deceased mothers to guide them on a journey calls them into the plot of the texts. Each young woman’s yearning to learn more about their mother entangles their waking life with the echoes of intentions from characters who only exist in the past. Magic amplifies the significance of this connection, allowing for us to view these mother-daughter relationships as animate, present, and central to the characters’ development.

On another level, the protagonists’ individualism becomes entangled with the world and people around them making it difficult to point to a moment where they fully “arrive” at their

¹² Katheryn Bond Stockton in *The Queer Child: or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* thinks about life factors that divert a linear tracing of growth for a queer child. While I am thinking about the movements that happen as characters revisit different parts of their past from new vantage points, Stockton considers what it means to be grown up (marriage, children, etc.) and how that is not realized by every child in the same way. Stockton writes, “Exquisitely rich problems await us. Among them is the matter of children’s delay: their supposed gradual growth, their suggested slow unfolding, which, unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, ‘growing up’)...Delay, we will see, is tremendously tricky as a conception, as is growth. Both more appropriately call us into notions of the horizontal—what spreads sideways—or sideways and backwards—more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time” (Stockton 4).

true self. After Shiori overcomes her magical curse and regains her external identity markers, her character goes on to reunite with her family. Yet instead of finding static harmony within her kingdom as a princess who marries and settles down, she decides to journey onwards by herself into the dragon-realm, continuing to eschew a cemented place in society. Built into this reunion with her uncursed, identifiable self, is the lingering feeling that the young woman who had the bowl stuck over her face has become an inscrutable and central part of Shiori. The element of magic here makes her ending full of the unknown, and thus protects Shiori from being written into a predetermined finale. But even if she had seemingly found her place in the world which she still might at the end of Lim's unfinished trilogy, I would still read her development as ongoing, and spontaneous, knowing that she will continue to be pulled in new directions and will have to look back at her past in order to grow.¹³

Building on this imaginative expansion past the ending of a novel, an untraceable and spontaneous coming-of-age narrative infused with the mutability of magic makes it impossible to

¹³ Sarah Hentges in *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature* thinks about the ways that readers can interpret YA dystopian literature automatically following eurocentric dominant models: "The frames that we typically use to understand this genre—literature, YA dystopia, and the female protagonist—are incomplete not only out of critical necessity, but also because they are each shaped by dominant approaches and 'Anglo' tastes. They are, like virtually everything, white washed, not because of evil intent, but because of legacies of cultural and scholarly processes" (Hentges 11). I argue that the way we read endings for characters can play into the kinds of readings that Hentges wants to criticize. Hentges goes on to say how YA Dystopian literature as a genre resists this Anglo (it seems like she is gesturing towards Anglo colonialist culture) framework: "To continue a pattern of white supremacy and its intersections with capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and exceptionalism is in direct contradiction with the ideas and ideals embodied in YA dystopia...but it is inevitable without active resistance and re-orientation" (Hentges 11).

ignore the plurality of each character. At one moment, Bree's spirit time travels from a graveyard into the lives of her ancestors, and then at another instant, she is falling in love for the first time with two different men. Deonn does not make Bree's ultimate learning lesson in the novel be one of race—rather, racism is embedded in the world of the novel while the questions of motherhood and magic and of love become the focal point. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold discusses the ways that the YA publishing industry can push for writers of color to create novels that are seen as identity pieces rather than more universal coming-of-age plots. Bold presents the conflicting approach to contemporary YA novels, “Issues of ‘race’ and racism intrude on the writing and publishing experience of YA authors of colour...As Bourdieu...argues, ‘on the one side are the dominant figures, who want continuity, identity, reproduction; on the other, the newcomers, who seek discontinuity, rupture, differences, revolution’ (p. 106)” (Bold 21). I would argue that *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* fall into the latter group by presenting elements of racism and sexism in a matter-of-fact way (or in Lim's case, almost not addressed at all while still featuring a protagonist of color, challenging the desire for her to constantly identify herself in the text via race) while allowing their characters to not be defined only by those experiences. But although Bold presents two sides to YA literature, I like to think of an unpredictable growth model as detectable and accessible in any YA novel whether it is politically radical or it is a mainstream

Disney princess plot;¹⁴ some texts might resist such a reading,¹⁵ but that is where intentional imagination on the reader's part comes into play.

My insistence on connecting a sporadic and unpredictable growth trajectory in YA speculative fiction to how we read the texts draws upon the intimate relationship to the texts as an audience. Karafilis asserts that,

Many women writers of color, both ethnic American and postcolonial, use the *Bildungsroman* precisely to 'affirm and assert' the complex subjectivities of their characters and, by extension, themselves. Such writers have adopted and radically revised the classical *Bildungsroman* to suit their purposes of narrating the development of a personal identity and sense of self, and they have proven that doing so is not necessarily an impossible task even in fragmented and alienated contemporary societies (Karafilis 64).

I want to build on Karafilis' notion that we constantly reconfigure an existing model of development as a way to mirror back our own potentiality as writers of color and as people in general by the ways that our analyses disrupt the original *Bildungsroman*. In addition to this, I find the relationship between marginalized readers and YA speculative fiction as complex and

¹⁴ In Disney's *Cinderella*, Cinderella's friendship with the mice might imply a rich interior world that we only glimpse at. The mice might represent different facets of her own personhood that manifests via magic in these talking animals. At the end, when she marries the prince, we can read that as *one* part of herself that is following a pathway towards a certain kind of harmonious ending that satisfies the desire for a monogamous love-plot. Meanwhile, the parts of her selves that can speak to mice does not clearly end, making the idea of completion and a normative presentation of marriage shaky.

¹⁵ In *Six Crimson Cranes* a marriage narrative plays out in Shiori's imagination, "The future flashed before me, and I saw myself trapped in Castle Bushian, married to a faceless lord and confined to a room where I sewed and sewed until the end of my days. If it *was* a choice between that and demons taking me, I'd choose the demons. *Besides, how often does one get to learn sorcery from a dragon?* I knew if I didn't take this chance, I would regret it forever" (Lim 42). Lim explores the "what if" scenario that can be lost in many *Bildungsroman* narratives that end in marriage which directly resists that kind of static conclusion.

rich as the fantastical worlds of the literature becomes entangled in the reader's own growth movements. The immersive qualities of adventurous development narratives that are imbued with fantastical elements invites the reader to move in and out of reality while magical quests invoke (for me) feelings of awe, longing, and amazement.

I believe that the fantastical and magical elements of *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* shed light upon the obstacles marginalized youth might face in their own growth, yet at the same time they incorporate into the texts the deeply important aspect of hope and wonder. This is part of what makes speculative fiction so impactful because the deeply imaginative ways that the stories are told help to open us up to life with less rigid understandings of what is possible, as we normalize the ideas that might have previously appeared improbable. Shiori's implanted memories of her mother which are improbable without magic productively highlight the idea that memories themselves are spaces of growth and entangled areas of tension between oneself and authoritative figures.

I found it helpful to read scholarship on YA literature that thinks about imagination's role providing rebellious space within social hierarchies, and that takes a critical look at the coming-of-age *Bildungsroman* narrative form. Writer Ebony Elizabeth Thomas in puts the matter of magic and Whiteness in the YA tradition plainly,

'There is no magic.' This statement, perhaps most famously attributed to Harry Potter's uncle Vernon Dursley, is also something that my mother has said to me since I was a child. Magic has long been under siege in my culture, social class, and hometown. The eldest daughter of an African American, working-class, Detroit family, I was born in the late 1970s just as the fires of the Civil Rights era were smoldering to ashes. My mother was doing me a favor by letting me know that magic was inaccessible to *me*...I was warned against walking through metaphoric looking glasses, trained to be suspicious of magic rings, and assured that no gallant princes were *ever* coming to my rescue...The promise from Disney's classic *Cinderella* film, 'In dreams you will lose your heartache...whatever you wish for, you keep,' was obscured by the real

conditions of my existence as a young Black woman in early twenty-first century America (Thomas 2).

Thomas's testimony points to the ways that YA speculative fiction can let people of color down when the texts fail to mirror back elements of their own lives. What does it mean when a person feels that even in the collective imagination of the mainstream? Also, what does it mean when that desire to be imaginatively a part of a world where the obstacles of everyday society become circumnavigated by magic is fulfilled? Karen Tongson looks at Southern California suburbs through the lens of queer theory as a way to think about the distant connections and communities that form amongst marginalized communities through a shared love of music and culture, which Tongson terms as "remote intimacy" (Tongson 27). Tongson writes, "remote intimacy brings people, things, and concepts together, even if suburban space and time dictates their dispersal and isolation" (Tongson 27). If we put Thomas' desire for community through YA speculative fiction into conversation with Tongson's "remote intimacy" we hear the voice of someone whose access into that intimacy somehow fell through the cracks. Does Thomas' lack of connectivity make the case for the importance of representation? Or is each person's admittance into such intimacies impacted deeply by luck and chance? The invitation into a textual community could occur if one can see their own struggles relayed back to them in some shape or form, and *also*, it could happen through the dissonance of not seeing oneself represented. Tongson and Thomas illuminate communities that linger in liminal cultural spaces and are made legible when their frustrations, desires, and connections are written about.

To back up their personal anecdote with statistical evidence, Thomas presents the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Children's Book center's study which looked at publishing trends for children and YA every year for over two decades. The study found that "...every year, over 85 percent of all books published for children and young adults feature White

characters—a statistic that has barely moved since the 1960s” (Thomas 4). Meanwhile, a study on the YA genre put out by a professor from the University College of London revealed that in the UK 19.6% of YA books published in 2019 were by authors of color which was a significant jump from 7.1% in 2017 (Flood). The study found that many of these books are from U.S. writers. Given these statistics, it becomes clear that the demographic of mainstream YA speculative fiction is shifting. What I am curious about is how this increased inclusivity impacts how we think about a protagonist’s development.

Speculative works are uniquely able to access the imagination in a way that can offer thoughtful social criticism while inspiring a sense of awe. Both novels contain elements that are impossible, and also, they feel emotionally rich and deal with recognizable issues. For instance, In *Six Crimson Cranes*, Shiori’s brothers who are cursed as cranes that transform into their human forms by night illustrate the separation between public and private life while also throwing that distinction into question. This analogy also touches on our gendered and racialized exterior masks we find ourselves wearing in society. But beyond that, the soaring figures of family members in the sky both unreachable and beautiful, allows for the reader to feel the ache of loss and the hopefulness of free movement. The tradition of scholarly work on imagination is far reaching. In his distillation of the work of Gaston Bachelard, Edward K. Kaplan writes,

For Bachelard...imagination ‘is rather the faculty of liberating us from first images [here, representations in perceptions], of changing images’ (ibid., 7). This freedom from a mental imitation of reality...Bachelard calls the ‘function of the unreal,’ the imaginative force which enables man to create new images instead of adjusting to reality as given (Kaplan 2-3).

The inventive world-building in YA speculative fiction arguably resists the complete reproduction of our realities and assists in blurring boundaries between realities. This is important because that blurring cracks the foundations of social hierarchies that can seem fixed

especially to young readers. For instance, the healing power of “rootcraft” in *Legendborn* which Bree and her ancestors cultivate from the earth, imbues the socioeconomic and physical terrain of the American South with a rebellious resistance to the legacy of slavery that can be harvested and used by African American women.

Bree and Shiori’s worlds actively provide us with different ways of understanding the process of growing up as magic complicates assumptions about who gets to be a three-dimensional uncategorizable subject. Terms like “repurposed” “recode” “reinventing” are helpful because I believe that *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* reconfigure linear ideas of growth in the ways that they take symbols and myths and disturb their meaning. Following a tradition of retelling fairy tales, both writers engage in acts of recodifying invented worlds and push the meaning of these stories into new directions. For example, *Six Crimson Cranes* is a retelling of Anderson’s *Wild Swans* which features a spiteful queen who hates her daughter’s beauty and thus curses her. Lim reinvents the trope of the evil queen and the mistrust amongst female characters by having Shiori’s seemingly evil step-mother Raikama who is the queen turn out to be her protector. In the end it is revealed that Shiori’s memories of cooking with her mother from childhood were magically gifted to her from Raikama to give Shiori a sense of having a living mother to provide solace to her throughout her life. I argue that this is a feminist reconfiguration of *Wild Swans*. Meanwhile, Deonn’s *Legendborn* takes the legend of King Arthur and his knights but puts it into conversation with the legacy of slavery in the American South, imagining a connection between the children of Slaveowners and the enslaved with Arthur. By doing this, Deonn invites Black readers into Arthurian lore and complicates the chivalric romanticization of Arthur and his knights.

Sourcing well-known identity tropes like with Lim's "evil step-mother" and Deonn's "brave knights" and then reconfiguring how those tropes play out is crucial to the work being done by the novels. José Esteban Muñoz's work on "disidentifications" looks into ways that marginalized performers and artists carve out spaces within creative work where their identities can be expressed complexly and reconsiders racial and gendered stereotypes (Muñoz 7). I am interested in how Muñoz considers liberating world-building for the marginalized subject because it touches on the productive qualities of speculative fiction. The presence of magic in Lim and Deonn's novels allows them to situate their audience within their fantastical desires and political longings. Lim and Deonn are able to "disidentify" their texts from the tropes they recycle and transform (like with the knights and the step-mother) as well as complicate their female protagonists by not satisfying a classic *Bildungsroman* ending. Muñoz thinks about the difficulty of presenting identities within creative work,

The processes of crafting and performing the self that I examine here are not best explained by recourse to linear accounts of identification. As critics who work on and with identity politics well know, identification is not about simple mimesis, but, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us... "always includes multiple processes of identifying with. It also involves identification as against; but even did it not, the relations implicit in identifying with are, as psychoanalysis suggests, in themselves quite sufficiently fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal..." Identification... as Sedgwick explains, is never a simple project. Identifying with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counteridentifying, as well as only partially identifying, with different aspects of the social and psychic world (Muñoz 8).

Deonn contends with some of this complexity by presenting the fictional world as always inscribed with dualistic historical narratives. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is introduced in the text within the context of it being infamously built by enslaved people and complexly presents Bree as being aware of this, while also being invested in her education from

this institution. Furthering this hybridity, Bree finds that she has common goals with the women that fight the colonialist magical powers on campus as well as falls in love with two men from that problematic society. Bree's identity becomes slippery here and is unable to be "rendered a static caricature" (Muñoz 1).

Throughout my thesis I search for ideas that help me trace a coming-of-age trajectory that constantly slips through my fingers. What I continue to find is that "growing-up" is more of a series of unpredictable movements that leads the protagonist deeper into the maze of their own past, present, and future where everything collides. This is why literature that leans into displays of dissonance and of departures from normative representations of identities and which look toward elusive communities that haunt the texts guide me in this task like flashlights that confirm my own stumbling movements down a path I cannot see.

Magic

the great swing glides us over a
 soft valley as dark brown hair flutters a river
 behind us tracing an endless arc across the sky,

ghostly becomes that arc; two figures lying in a field thick novels for faces
 she longs to be loved to be held and
 she misses running through the valley beneath planets which spin and
 they glide further sharing an inner-vision of the field as they pack up and clamber into
 their vehicle driving home bursting discussing laughing outraged¹⁶

Princess Shiori of the mythical kingdom of Katana in Lim's *Six Crimson Cranes* meets a half-dragon boy named Seryu who secretly helps her to understand the forbidden magic she possesses, "[Seryu says] 'Few can bring paper birds to life. I suspect you have a talent for inspiration.' 'Inspiration?' [Shiori responds] 'You can imbue things with bits of your soul. It's almost like resurrection, but not quite so powerful. You could probably...revive a few wilted flowers—if you so desired'" (Lim 44). Lim amplifies the idea that an individual can contain a multitude of selves with Shiori's paper bird, Kiki, who, the half dragon boy teaches her is a part of her soul. Magic in YA speculative fiction can shed light on complex ideas of the developing self in an overt way, like with the piece of Shiori's interior flying around and providing her friendship during times of loneliness. The "self" as mutable, varying, and unstable becomes a

¹⁶ Joyful is the connection between friends or in this case, sisters, when we step into a magical landscape together, read the impossible together, share the essence of a world captured within pages together. Are we adding a dimensionality to our relationship that transcends concepts of what is reasonable? Perhaps as our relationship shifts and morphs and deepens with time, magic from the fantasy novels we both read invites us to share a piece of that gray space wedged between worlds.

fantastical possibility for readers within Shiori's expanding world. Here we can see the liberatory opportunities that this speculative world allows the marginalized performer which Muñoz discusses. Shiori's bird represents the multi-faceted nature of her interior space that a fantastical world can illustrate for readers in an overt, almost over-the-top way. To put it plainly, I am suggesting that each one of us might contain many versions of an identity that grows in different ways at different times; the way we might comprehend life in one moment impacts which fragment of ourselves is engaging with the world based upon the context of a situation. For instance, Shiori takes on the role of a younger sister when she is with her brothers, a princess when she is in the palace, a magical being when she is alone, a daughter in the proximity of her parental figures, a grieving person when reminded of her mother's death, a cursed person as she roams the world with a bowl over her head, a lonely person as she becomes isolated in her curse, a cook in the Kingdom of Iro, a friend, and the list goes on endlessly based upon context. Her paper bird shows us how these parts of our identity can speak back to one another, be contradictory, and also develop variously.

Magic reveals a multitude of potential selves within the characters of YA novels while also destabilizing the fixedness of the landscape the characters travel across. In *Legendborn* a network of magical tunnels on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are revealed to Bree by the powerful mage Sel. Bree asks Sel, "Did you just cast a tunnel?" He doesn't wait for me to follow... 'I *revealed* a tunnel. The tree trunk is the illusion, and an old one. The founders knew that the university would need to be a public front, so they dug tunnels for easy movement and caves for storage before the campus was built'" (Deonn 274). Bree's landscape instantly becomes alterable while also exposed as layered with political desires on the part of the school's

founders. UNC at Chapel Hill is a college infamously built by enslaved people,¹⁷ so this network of tunnels gestures towards a history of secrecy, survival, and violence. Deonn links institutions of education to the institution of slavery and the legacy of colonialism providing readers with an understanding of the intersecting forces of oppression that surround Bree. Magic blurs concepts of stability rather than reinforces them; the illusion of the tree which leads to an underground network of tunnels puts everything else into question because before this moment a tree functioned as a tree for Bree. When fundamental fixtures of our world, like trees, become recodified, everything else we believed to be fixed becomes a little more shaky. In this revelatory moment from *Legendborn* we might understand Bree as entangled with the environment of the campus, the history of race and power in the South, and her contentious relationship to the authoritative figure of Sel and even with the school's long passed founders, all of which is amplified by the mutable presence of magical tunnels. These tunnels that lead to a network of buildings and underground chambers were intentionally built for the magical descendants of King Arthur's knights, and they become repurposed when they are shown to Bree. Access to alternative routes on campus invites a sense of disorder into Bree's world as a labyrinth of potential lies before her. We can think of Bree's previous understandings of campus before her discovery of the tunnels as being layered with hidden realities which impacted her just by existing even if she could not see them.

I will explore that enmeshed relationship further when I propose a theoretical reshaping of the *Bildungsroman* later in this paper. Another crucial part of magic to consider is its ability to show us how different characters utilize power whether it be for personal gain, upholding the

¹⁷ The New York Times' article written by Jacey Fortin "U.N.C. Chancellor Apologizes for History of Slavery at Chapel Hill" confirms that "Slaves built and maintained properties on campus from its foundation in 1793 until the end of the Civil War in 1865" (Fortin).

status quo in a situation, or for rebellion. When power is depicted as fantastical it makes it challenging to point to one specific reason for a character's power; wealth, race, gender, ability, and class lose their separation and appear ambiguously intertwined.

In *Legendborn* and *Six Crimson Cranes* the protagonists embody their magical powers in ways tied to various dimensions of their identity. Also, they face layered kinds of oppression from their proposed enemies. For example, Bree's therapist¹⁸ and rootcraft guide on campus warns her about the kind of power (bloodcraft) which the Arthurian society (the Order) wields, "Bloodcraft is a curse brought to life... Colonizer magic. Magic that *costs* and *takes*. Many practitioners face demons. Many of us face evil. But from the moment their founders arrived, from the moment they *stole* Native homelands, the Order themselves gave the demons plenty to feed on!" (Deonn 233). Here, Bree's rootcraft power is distinguished in function and nature from the power of the Arthurian order which her guide warns her is deeply connected to a history of colonialism and violence against Native Americans. What is implied here is that Bree's own identity as an African American woman should make her wary of the kind of power which the bloodcrafters use. Throughout her novel, Deonn ties the authoritative figures of the Arthurian order to UNC at Chapel Hill's founders to slave owners and finally as a whole to the settler mindset of early American colonizers. Interestingly though, as time in the novel passes, Bree discovers that she contains the ability to wield bloodcraft *and* rootcraft power.

¹⁸ The theme of therapy in *Legendborn* is interesting to note because it suggests that growth is something we intentionally work on at times through the support of a community or a relationship with another person. This vulnerability with another person in the coming-of-age narrative shows how growth in itself as a critical process of getting to know oneself and asking for help has become more accepted in recent years. Rather than "tough it out," Bree asks for tools to help her deal with grief, and importantly, what she discovers in this process is a new aspect of her magical powers called "rootcraft."

Bree's own identity occupies intersections of power as someone whose lineage can be traced back to slave owners and the enslaved. The racial violence and oppression that has taken place between different facets of Bree's heritage points towards an incredibly complex mixing of intergenerational desires and movements. Meanwhile Shiori's identity as an Asian American is mixed up in her curse that renders her as strange and unknowable. Anna M. Moncada Storti challenges concepts of the mixed-race identity that can render a human into an objectified "other" by searching for moments of blurring between the subject and the subject as object. Storti looks into Jennifer Ling Datchuk's porcelain artwork thinking of ties between the Chinese ceramic pieces and representations of Asian women. The physical implications of porcelain interests Storti which made me think about Shiori's bowl that sits over her head and its durability and opaqueness. Storti finds,

What Datchuk forces me to confront is the peculiar condition of being not *either* person *or* thing, but something else, some thing like half *and* both. The ornamental dimensions of Asian femininity, as vitrified by porcelain, may reveal yellow as a surface skin, but to be able to speak of my whole self – of the yellow woman mixed with white – I fail to find language in the subject/object divide" (Storti 105).

Oftentimes represented in the novel as ugly and disturbing, Lim queers stereotypes of the subservient and pleasing Asian woman that can be connected to the delicate touch of porcelain within Datchuk's work with the rough presence of the bowl. Also, the bowl adds a third dimension to the dualistic "Asian-American" identity, reconfiguring possible assumptions about Shiori's identity. I urge that we push on ideas of solidly fixed identities because both Bree and Shiori contain nuanced histories of conflicting and intertwined desires and perspectives which stem from their lineages and from how the public views them. Deonn is arguably *restructuring* the separation between rootcraft and bloodcraft with Bree's own complicated alliance to both groups and her own intersectional identity. Magic functions as the kind of metaphor which has

the potential to rework ideas of separation between identities like gender, and to instead, contextualize them in a space where boundaries become blurred. So even though I am arguing that there are different facets of a personality as shown by Shiori's bowl and Bree's varying historical power sources, I am ultimately arguing that the separation between such facets are porous, and spontaneously interconnected.

Lim's *Six Crimson Cranes* contends with a different set of challenges than *Legendborn* because the protagonist exists in what appears to be a vaguely East Asian racially homogenous fictional world. This ambiguity seems like a choice made intentionally by the author which makes it more difficult for the reader to immediately codify characters' identities as belonging to certain histories or cultures. Also, Lim's homogeneity and vagueness seems to touch on common xenophobic representations of Asian cultures as monolithic, foreboding, and robotic. We can think about the prevalence of techno-orientalist representations of the future like within Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* or musician Grimes' music video "Shinigami Eyes" where Asianness paints a generic dystopian future while the humanity of Asian characters is problematically lost in the narrative. Lim might be purposefully playing into that generic representation and then subverting it by providing a three-dimensional protagonist. In Lim's story, magic oozes into emotional and psychological spaces: the dread of marriage within Shiori, feelings of isolation as a cursed person, the anger and crude violence of the generic demons, grief for a deceased mother, and the hidden love and protection imparted by Shiori's step-mother Raikama.

The half-dragon boy Seryu reacts to Shiori's magically produced flowers which communicates something intimate about her inner life to him. Seryu remarks, "Magic has many threads. The same enchantment cast with joy will have an entirely different result when cast with sorrow, or anger—or fear. Something to be wary of, especially with powers like yours" (Lim

46). Here, magic becomes a metaphor for the unspoken desires of one's interior space. When Shiori uses her magic to conjure Peonies, we witness a movement happening from her interior self to the exterior world, and perhaps then transmitting feelings into her friend Seryu's interior. I want to highlight here how growth through an internal to external movement and the entanglement of others within that movement is exemplified through Shiori's magical flowers.

I want to consider Shiori's identity seems to intentionally fade away from the movement of the plot at times while Bree's always remains present. Furthermore, I will look at scenes where magic amplifies the loss or persistence of these identities. Rather than reading Shiori as a single entity moving through the text, I propose that we understand her as a fragment of a whole. This is one way that we eschew the need to distinguish her individuality as being complete and separate. When Shiori is magically cursed, her identity becomes stripped; a magical bowl covers most of her face and she is unable to speak because she is told that with every word uttered, one of her brothers will die. Lim situates her whole text in a gray space where magic is able to express the inexpressible and identities appear unstable (although they do not fully vanish). Shiori's ambiguous identity disrupts the communities who she encounters as various characters fear her and abuse her. This allows Lim to criticize the value that we place upon a person's face or their ability to speak, and dramatically alters the kinds of concessions and negotiations Shiori must make. Rather than being a princess destined for an arranged marriage, Shiori, stripped of her previous identity, has to learn how to survive on her own as a cook and then as a captive of a foreign Kingdom. As her external markers become shrouded in the curse, Shiori's internal selves experience a kind of rebirth, explicated by the surroundings she finds herself within as she first awakens: "This wasn't home. I was on the top of a hill, no palace in sight, and in place of Gindara was the sea. I could see it from every direction, the gray water lapping the horse.

Raikama had stranded me on an island” (Lim 82). The idea of a teenage girl here becomes the idea of water, movement, desire, power, as natural as the fixtures of nature and as mutable.

The magical removal of Shiori’s previous identity markers like her voice and the upper-half of her face invokes the presence of absence within the text. What is absent in Lim’s fictional world becomes another kind of movement which occurs between the subject (Shiori) and her location (the unidentifiable island she wakes up on). Additionally, the placement of Shiori on an island surrounded by water further conjures up a sense of what is missing or unlocatable. Michelle Huang’s reading of Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*, a story about the 2011 tsunami in Japan, helps us frame this moment in *Six Crimson Cranes*. Huang writes, “The shape of the Pacific Ocean is hard to imagine: in addition to a dominant tendency to see oceans as the absence of land...Rather than thinking of the Pacific Ocean as a homogenous gap between Asian and America, *A Tale for the Time Being* demonstrates that the Pacific Ocean’s currents are what bind them together...” (Huang 101). While Huang thinks specifically of the Pacific Ocean, I consider Lim’s ocean as both a metaphor for the interior world of Shiori, the dissonance that magic has caused between Shiori’s sense of self and her new location, and the vagueness of the Asian American identity as a group. Building off of Huang, I argue that the temporary loss of Shiori’s voice and facial features recodifies her situatedness within the landscape; faceless and voiceless she is forced to reestablish differentiations between her own identity and the natural scenery thus highlighting the seamlessness between subject and world. Shiori’s internal voice and embodied sensations become heightened in the absence of other features as they react to the ocean and land. Our reading of Shiori then as a spontaneous reactive feature of a larger landscape enacts the absence of her identity while also exposes the communal relationship she shares with the world around her. Shiori’s growth deviates from the direction she

had been headed as a princess and becomes more amorphous; the landscape and her stripped identity amalgamate into a shared sense of the curse.

Yet another way to interpret Shiori's curse is that it invites a moment of dissonance between the Asian American identity and Shiori's own personality which is made available because of magic. Muñoz considers the politics of being able to access moments of "disidentification" within art and performance, "The fiction of identity is one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects. Minoritarian subjects need to interface with different sub cultural fields to activate their own senses of self" (Muñoz 5). Shiori's ties to symbols of cranes and dragons and dynastic rulers often associated with East Asian cultures drops away in this scene of utter isolation both from the world and in some senses, from herself with the loss of her usual characteristics. In some ways, she is able to occupy a momentary state of generic potential that White subjects often are privy to; her identity is presented as fictional and thus changeable. Lim utilizes the absence of specific racial markers as a way to liberate the potentiality and flexibility of her protagonist. Shiori's genericism here reconfigures the common stereotype of all Asians being similar by taking the agency out of that statement and harnessing it for her own means of possibility.

While Shiori's curse invites us to think about the shedding of identities, Bree's magic presents identity as an intangible yet present force which reverberates throughout the text. There is a formative scene in *Legendborn* when Bree discovers that magical flames can burst from her hands if she is angry or especially emotional. Bree attempts to control the powerful flames, "I squeeze my eyes shut. Find my barrier. Shape it into every image I've ever used to contain After-Bree and her explosive, dangerous rage—and then some. A wall made of brick. Made of steel. With bolts the size of my fist" (Deonn 153). Bree wills the flames to manifest into

psychological materials like steel, blurring the boundaries between her interiority and exteriority. Within this moment Bree's selves toggle between a powerful mage, to the Bree before her mother's traumatic death ("After-Bree"), to a form that she does not understand yet. What is consistent here in this scene is the reverberations of Bree's own essence which is at once an individual experience that can contain a multitude of experiences within that space. Bree's diverse array of selves takes part in Muñoz's "disidentification" because the reader is unable to categorize her as specifically enacting one culture, but rather we are invited to think of her as inhabiting Arthurian legends, African American history in the South, life as a college student, and most importantly, an untranslatable slippery culture which is essentially "Bree."

The magical instability of Lim and Deonn's worlds invite readers into spaces of the unbelievable, the impossible, and the ridiculous. After Bree's therapist reveals to her that she has the power of "rootcraft" in her blood passed down from her mother Bree recalls,

I almost fell off the bench. How many times in a week can one have their world spun and fractured and put back together again? A dozen? Two dozen? After-Bree presses against the walls that restrain her. Against surprise and secrets and another moment of my life that breaks the world open a little further (Deonn 164).

Yet within the act of turning us towards the impossible, is an investment in our real world. Disorientation becomes productive in these circumstances as they signal a series of movements that occur which further entangle the protagonist with the lives of others and the world around them. Here, growth is both social and personal. The enigmatic presence of the Pacific Ocean leaves its residue upon Lim's text as Asian American movements across time and space get called forth in Shiori's disoriented state of waking up cursed next to an expanse of water. At once the ocean is both a metaphor and a literal gesture towards a specific political place challenging us to reconsider how space operates in a speculative world. By not naming the body of water, Lim reorients us within a space of confusion and displacement and then continues to build Shiori's

interiority upon the pages. Magic does not only reconfigure realities, it becomes a part of the process of meeting and remeeting oneself, an animate moving force of power that flows through the pages exposing the entangled connectivity between characters and their worlds. The legacy of U.S. slavery is a pervasive theme throughout Deonn's work as she continues to highlight its embeddedness within Bree's life. Unlike Lim, Deonn delves into the specific political realities of American history. In the era of Trump and the fight to ban critical race theory in educational institutions, Deonn's departure from reality which never fully deviates from themes of slavery in the novel seems intentional. Flaming palms and magical paper birds do not appear to function purely for aesthetic joy, although that remains an integral part of the reading experience. In addition to feelings of wonder, the ambiguous presence of magic offers a view of the individual as ever-shifting from interior spaces to exterior ones and then back again. The idea of a solidifying "self" within the *Bildungsroman* becomes disturbed by varying sources of magical powers within Bree and by the somewhat inscrutable identity of Shiori and her location.

Memories

grass glows in a warm, late-summer haze
 freckled skin moves, large hands toss
 i float upwards towards the leaves
 there is no sound that i can recall but i'll fill it in-
 clambering windchimes echo through this dark bedroom¹⁹

In *Legendborn*, when Bree's father gives her a bracelet which her deceased mother left for her, she is suddenly triggered into a magically concealed memory,

Even now, the smell of her in the velvet is strong and alive, like she'd never left. It overwhelms me, bypassing any rational parts of my brain and zinging straight to memory...Inside the box my mother's charm bracelet is pulsing like a heartbeat. When the tips of my fingers touch the gold links, a voice echoes in my mind. 'Bree...'...As soon as I lift the bracelet and grasp it in my hands, my eyes flutter shut. A memory takes me over (Deonn 386-7).

¹⁹ The echoing wind chimes represent the reverberations of sounds, feelings, thoughts, images that pass between memories and the present moment. This memory is from my childhood when I was young enough for my father to be able to toss me into the sky and then catch me while he lay on his back below the Alder tree on our property. Usually I just remember the green of his shirt blending into the native grass and the smell of a freshly mowed lawn. I also can sense the presence of my mother in the kitchen and when I recall this memory I tend to think about her perspective from the kitchen which overlooked the backyard. Over the years I have questioned if this memory was "real" or if it was a generalized feeling from a certain era in my life. The colors and sensations of that toss mirror back something deep within me which is the vital knowledge that I was deeply loved and cared for at a young age, a privilege I have come to appreciate as I age. I like to think of those colors (greens, shades of blue, the gray of my father's hair, the black of my mother's hair) as tinting the lenses through which I see my life sometimes. The layers of my memories upon my present reality exist as a sort of palimpsest, at times translucently showing up at the same time mapping onto one another while at other times they feel separated and opaque.

Throughout the two texts, memories become locations of growth and self-discovery, defying a sense of linearity within the coming-of-age narrative as it forces us to constantly look backwards. The bracelet consumes Bree psychologically and transports her from her present life to a day in her childhood, disrupting normative ideas of time; the past overtakes the present while Bree's senses remain intact. Deonn constantly revives moments of erasure within Bree's own narrative pointing us towards layers of unseen living forces that move through the text, surfacing when called upon and then seemingly disappearing again. Similar to how magic exposes entangled webs between the subject and their world, I argue that memories can operate as signposts of the palimpsest of interconnected temporal realities that Bree and Shiori inhabit at any given moment.

The memory embedded in the bracelet is a narrative which functions from the axes of the crypt, quite literally, because the message within the bracelet reaches Bree after her mother's death. This puts Bree's own future in the context of the death that she will one day inhabit just like her own mother, and places subjecthood into a shared space of the living and the dead. If we think of Bree as growing from the situatedness of her own crypt,²⁰ then the forward motions that happen in a *Bildungsroman* become a kind of productive decomposition; as "coming-of-age" clarifies itself as "moving-towards-death" and the crypt services as a necessary stage in a cycle

²⁰ My usage of "crypt" here comes from Tavia Nyong'o's considerations of how afro-fabulation could offer us something more productive and meaningful than that of representation. For Nyong'o, afro-fabulation has the ability to address and offer something other than the mainstream codification of the world where "black" can be synonymous with "death." Nyong'o thinks about afro-fabulation's efforts to create futures based upon erasures within historical archives, as well as to think of the subject operating like a "crypt": "If I have so far...called upon afro-fabulation to do the work of narrating the angular socialities of the present, the impossible histories that we draw into our now, and the cryptic futures in which our deaths are seeded, then this conclusion asks after the consequence of considering the body as both archive and *crypt*" (Nyong'o 200).

that also will return us into life (like living on in a bracelet). Bree's magically triggered memory arrives in place of its own absence, signifying that her personal archive has been tampered with. As Bree is pulled backwards into a memory she never knew existed, her childhood awakens within the text as a living breathing entity where previously unknown energetic forces like her mother's own magic become apparent. At the same time, her childhood can be framed as having *always* co-existed with her mother's own impending death and thus in its liveliness is the location of potential decay. Bree's growth is measurable in the ways that she interprets and interacts with her memories rather than the memories themselves, creating a sense of looking forwards and backwards at the same time. Yet if we consider the idea of erased memories, suddenly the movement also shifts us into "looking around" a gap in the personal archives *until* it becomes uncovered.

Bree's tampered memory operates as a threshold for thinking about the ways we craft narratives to serve a specific temporal moment. In this framing, memories and archives lose their solidification as objects of the past to grow "up" and "out of." In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman contemplates the absence and erasure of the enslaved within our collective archives. I will use the term "memories" when referencing characters' recollections of past events that happened to them while "archives" will be used to describe the collection of those memories as stored artifacts which make up our understanding of history. Traveling from America to Ghana, Hartman talks to many people and walks through dungeons where slaves were held, expressing her felt-experience in these moments. Constantly in the book she searches for voices that are untraceable, and stories which were never written by the enslaved as a way to contend with our contemporary moment. Hartman puts forth,

I wanted to engage the past, knowing that its perils and dangers still threatened and that even now lives hung in the balance. Slavery had established a measure of

man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black American, it is not because of antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 6).

This quote demonstrates the urgency of being knowledgeable of our past as it constantly informs the present. Time, for the marginalized subject, cannot follow linear projections of growth and progress because “moving forward” in such a way would erase a significant aspect of what “now” means. Maybe Bree as a subject is static in her temporal movement as the past, present, and future (which we might think of as Nyong’o’s invocation of the “crypt”) move through her and around her simultaneously, revealing their potential meanings based upon her own longings. Yet also, in the bracelet scene, Bree might be seen as constantly moving in different directions as the past version of herself shifts into the present and her future becomes steeped in the wishes of her deceased mother. I am not making the claim that there is no growth because of this presentation of the past, present, and future as one. What I would like to do is to refocus growth as something that deepens for Bree with every “return” to the past, and in her act of “reclaiming” a hidden fragment of her past self. This reframes growth as something that is cyclical, ongoing, and always in a transitory space rather than fixed.

Like Deonn, the mother figure in Lim’s novel manipulates the protagonist’s memories as a mode of protection. Shiori’s only clear memory of her deceased mother is of her cooking and singing with her in the kitchen and this becomes a life-long source of emotional support. In the end, it turns out that this memory had been a magical gift from her stepmother, Raikama, who was in fact the mother figure from her memories all along. Lim initially positions Raikama at odds with Shiori, depicted as power-seeking and dangerous, and then reveals her as a sacrificial

guardian. Shiori recites Raikama's true name to release the dragon pearl which has kept her a powerful sorceress and has kept her alive from her heart. Shiori proclaims,

I don't know your name. 'You've always known it,' said my stepmother, as if reading my thoughts. 'What is that song you used to sing in the kitchen?' My jaw parted and I stared. 'But...but those were memories with my mother.' 'No.' Her voice was gentle. 'Those memories were with me.' She began to sing, in a low rueful voice I hadn't heard in years: Channari was a girl who lived by the sea...I staggered back, unable to believe it. Stolen mornings in the kitchen laughing with my mother as she taught me to make fish soup. All of them were with Raikama? 'You missed her so much you wouldn't eat,' said my stepmother softly... 'Making you happy made me happy.' 'You used your magic on me.' 'For a short while,' she admitted. 'I wanted to give you memories of your mother. Memories that would make you smile, even when you came to despise me' (Lim 442-3).

In the absence of Shiori's biological mother, Raikama intentionally fabricates a memory and plants it magically into her stepdaughter's psyche. This implantation of a memory makes the case for memories being unreliable, changeable, and thus tenuous as sources of concrete "truth." But when Shiori's emotions map onto the fabricated memory, they provide an alternative kind of truth—one that is felt and very real for her. Shiori's self-perceptions of her childhood are upended, yet what persists is the sense of tenderness and mother-daughter relationship regardless of its origin. Lim subtly makes the feminist case for motherhood as something accessible to any person despite their biological connection to their child. Providing an archive of motherly affection, Raikama's critical reconstruction of Shiori's past forms a portal within Shiori's psychological landscape that can lead her towards unconditional love and safety.

Lim continues to imbue her protagonist with a sense of disorientation throughout the text, showing us that perhaps to fully know oneself or to be clearly oriented with the world, is impossible. If memories provide the narrative we look back at to contextualize our own growth, then Raikama's manipulated memory proves that the stories of our lives are always slipping into the stories of others, making growth a relational concept. Maybe the desire to figure out who we

are and where we belong is beside the point for Lim and Deonn; the protagonists in *Legendborn* and *Six Crimson Cranes* are in constant states of reaching for that self-knowledge, yet never finding a resolution. This lack of resolution for Bree and Shiori evades the traditional *Bildungsroman* ending for female-identifying characters, which classically has been either marriage or death (whether it be social death or actual death). Memories play an important role in signaling a continuous cycle that will play out beyond the pages as they facilitate the voices of deceased mother figures well beyond their life. Death, then, seems to deny the completion of a person's story as well, leaving us with the ghostly development of a life that plays out in the memories of the living people left behind.²¹

Memories are not only depicted as locations where love and grief are expressed in the novels—they are also written as spaces where a struggle against oppressive forces play out. Bree discovers that her memories of the night her mother died were manipulated by someone in the magical Bloodcraft order disguised as a police officer and a powerful mage:

“Details from that night spin like a hurricane, blocking out the world in layers. The flashback pulls me from the now and into the past, one sense at a time, until I'm in both places, both times at once... For the second time in twenty-four hours, my brain wrestles with two conflicting memories of the exact same moment... Now the new memories of the hospital wage war against the old ones, until finally, the lies dissolve. Selwyn and the police officer. Both chanted a spell... Both bent my mind to their will... The first time I saw magic was the night my mother died” (Deonn 45).

²¹ The poems I have written in this thesis point to my parents' lives as they develop and shift in tandem with my own growth. Is my deepening relationship to the essence of loved ones who have passed a solo project which locates where I sit developmentally in my life at this moment? Or are my memories of them still a part of their own posthumous growth? When tracing the growth of a protagonist, I keep realizing that the ways in which they occupy space in the memories of others is where any clear line becomes hard to follow.

Here, memories operate similar to magic as they move the protagonist into “both places, both times at once” (Deonn 45). Subtly throughout the text, the lines between magic and memories intersect in the ways that they both diverge the protagonist from forward seeming progress. By making memory manipulation a force of both good and evil, the protagonist’s past becomes mutable, contested, and political. Notably, one of the characters from the Arthurian Bloodcraft order who alters her memories against her will is a police officer, linking colonialist magic to cops. This scene showcases how Deonn pulls readers into her speculative world *just enough* to critically view society from a distance.

Sarah Hentges considers the critical distance which YA science fiction offers: “Science fiction has played this role for centuries. . . . As Tom Moylan explains, ‘The infamous ‘escapism’ attributed to sf does not necessarily mean a debilitating escape *from* reality because it can also lead to an empowering escape *to* a very different way of thinking about, and possibly of being in, the world’ ([Moylan]xvii)” (Hentges 22). Conversations around YA speculative literature often hint at this differing perspective on the genre; for some, the novels are fun stepping ladders to more serious literature in adulthood, while for others, they offer something fruitful for society in their own right. *Legendborn* and *Six Crimson Cranes* give us a unique perspective on life *because* of their adventurous fantastical elements and age demographics.²² I argue that the magical transportation of characters into different dimensions within their own memory archives

²² I think that there is a special movement that happens between a reader who is no longer considered a young adult and YA novels; when I read these books I am pulled back into my early adolescence and reconnect with the fragment of my younger self that seems to be lurking beneath the surface, ready to believe in underwater dragons and who wants to fall in love for the first time again.

and other critical imaginings of growth, allows the genre to be playfully critical of mainstream concepts of time and space.

Lim creates a narrative climax that takes place in Shiori's memories, significantly making her perceptions of the past the site of embattlement. Shiori fights her way through a mountain full of demons who seek to trap her in her past memories: "I was inside the palace but not the palace I grew up in...I wandered through a labyrinth of halls with endless turns and twists. If not for my thread, I would have been lost forever. Demons lurked, haunting me with old memories. Smells of my mother's fish soup, or my favorite dishes from the kitchen, forgotten years ago..." (Lim 426). Shiori's "thread" points towards that enduring essence of her character, which seems to be less rooted in a factual account of her history and external markers, and more so tied to her intentions and morals (Lim 426). If we understand Shiori as containing a multitude of selves following a similar pattern of intention and morality, then we are able to locate some kind of movement pattern. This pattern is significant because as mentioned earlier, memories can be implanted and manipulated proving that they can be contested and unreliable; instead of pointing towards the "truest" memories, Shiori moves towards ones that *feel* right to her in that moment. As Shiori moves through the "labrynth" of her memories something calls on her to move in the direction which she does that ultimately saves her life (Lim 426). Yet what calls to her is something we can never fully understand as it speaks of the internal and enigmatic qualities that make Shiori who she is. Rather, we can consider the significance of these movements taking place in the realm of memories—"turning backwards" or "returning" become the motions of growth.

Bree's quest to uncover her mother's past, and thus recontextualize her own life direction in a more comprehensive understanding of who her mother was guides the movements which she

makes. Yet the trials that both protagonists face and their growing pains throughout the novels signify the fact that they will never be able to fully return to their earlier lives. Furthermore, the texts make it clear that memories are contestable as the stories of those memories shift with the protagonists' movements in the present time, ultimately making it hard to distinguish between the past and the present. What does begin to emerge is a constant revolution into past memories that simultaneously pushes the protagonists forward into their plots .

Conclusion: The *Bildungsroman* Transformed: Magic, Memories, and the Unpredictable Movements of Growth in Young Adult Speculative Fiction

grooving under sun beams that touch my lips burn up darker dreams
 calling out and cradle lukewarm soda water you arrive and then arrive again
 wave over wave we spiral holding onto bubbles that rise in the aqua marine
 this feels good is all we know and the reef cuts deep our membrane which
 separates youth from whatever stage of life this is; salt skin kiss warmth
 arrival again²³

I have spent countless moments riveted by YA speculative fiction—bringing the books into a bath with me while the pages become splattered, or burying my nose in their thick bindings while I eat dinner. Sometimes, my sister will be across the table lost in the same fantasy series as I am.²⁴ The ways in which the dinner table, the textual world, and my sister become entangled in my life, challenges linearity in my own development—spontaneous movements from the table to the fictional world to the conversations we have pulls at different parts of my selves. As I age I continue to return to the YA speculative *Bildungsroman* narratives because they conjure up

²³ With this poem I wanted to lean into the wondrous beauty of a spiraling perception of life where returning to oneself contains a certain bitter sweetness and become the sites of growth. The “you” in this poem is purposefully confusing how many subjects are in the piece—are there two people floating in water or is it one person many times over? I wanted there to be a sense that in this life, there is room for endless possibilities—myself in many ways, a connection to another person in many ways, and for that other person to have continuous versions of themselves meeting, and on and on it goes.

²⁴ When I worked at a Chinese restaurant in Seattle, I used to serve this couple who would show up a few times a month to eat and read their matching fantasy novels together. This ritual always struck me as fascinating—while the chaos of the restaurant swirled around them, they were clearly experiencing a world together that I could only guess at from the book covers containing dragons and Knights. Tongson’s community comes to mind when I recall this couple as both remote as well as intimate.

feelings of “returning” back to different facets of my early adulthood, while also inspiring a continued playfulness in my present with the magic that pushes on the realities I accept. While other literature has captured my focus, there is something particularly consuming about this genre. Perhaps this is why YA speculative fiction has a tradition of intense fandom.²⁵ I argue that magic in these novels intentionally or unintentionally transports the text and reader into a different kind of “coming-of-age” narrative, one that does not necessarily have to do with time or aging, but rather with moments that draw us deeper into one another, entangles us further with personal and collective memories. *How* we deepen our enmeshment with the world is crucial; narratives like *Six Crimson Cranes* and *Legendborn* which center around marginalized perspectives help us expand our collective consciousness, making it a more inclusive space, while also pulling all of us in new directions towards unknown possibilities, “softening” the grip of linear presentations of development.

Throughout my thesis I have attempted to “reshape” the *Bildungsroman* but this reshaping implies that I am able to predict a pattern of movements within the texts. After looking closely at Lim and Deonn’s work, I find that their protagonists follow trajectories that have

²⁵ Anna Wilson in “Full-body reading” touches on the fanfiction that often arises from books like *Harry Potter* or from television like *Star Trek* which resists the institutionalized approaches to critical reading: “I discovered fanfiction in 2001, when I was 16, unhappy at school, and frequently mistaken for a boy in women’s bathrooms. I’d joined a number of web mailing listservs, desperate to make friends, and I remember vividly the first time one of the fanfiction writers I followed posted a story she’d written about a character from *The Lord of the Rings*. I was staggered. It was like nothing I’d ever read before...I’d always fantasized about stepping into books and having adventures with my favourite characters. Now I wrote them down and shared them” (Wilson). Although Deonn and Lim are not writing fanfiction, they are participating in the kinds of genres that Wilson seems to find fanfiction communities formed around. The immersive qualities, the communities they inspire to form, and perhaps the fact that they are often excluded from higher-education, makes speculative fiction particularly alluring.

reconfigured what I personally desire to do with the texts; I no longer want to assert control over the shape of the *Bildungsroman*, instead I want to let it run its chaotic course of twists and turns and returns and revolutions. In a sense, the *Bildungsroman* no longer serves this work as its very genre and narrative form is transformed by Bree and Shiori and their magical undertakings. But at the same time, I do not want to fully turn away from the original model since it is in the act of “returning” that we can sense the shifts that we have collectively made. In the end, I am left with a collection of movements made by the protagonists and by myself as the reader which are *always* incomplete and uncontainable in their endings as neither Bree nor Shiori solidify into a determinable single “self.” Shiori’s magical bird and the queering presence of the bowl that covers her face point to a rich plethora of fragments of the self that also are spontaneous and unpredictable in their surfacing and interactions with one another. Lim repurposes stereotypes about race and identity and breathes new life into those tropes by infusing them with magic and inscrutability. The impact of having the protagonists become undefinable as they display their multifaceted potential is that I can no longer suggest one equilibrium that they might find at the end of the novels. Even if one aspect of their identity seemingly resolves, for example in a love-plot, the other layers of their being continue to play out beneath the surface, gesturing towards countless possibilities.

The lines between reality and imagination become less important to define as we surrender our readings of these novels to an embodied appreciation for the varying desires that come from the characters’ strange motions from inwards to outwards and forwards and backwards, and then back again. Deonn’s description of Bree’s sudden magical collision with her past arguably illustrates this swaying back and forth, “Another stab of pain. Then, I feel a strange, fluttering panic, like I’ve just tumbled down a staircase, but instead of hitting the floor at

the bottom, I tip forward–into memories” (Deonn 69). Tracing “forward progress” in a sequence like this is almost impossible, and perhaps it is not the point. Maybe it is in the act of witnessing the lives of others form upon the page, and then become entangled with our own experience, that the transformed *Bildungsroman* finds its productive “non-footing.” Shiori watches a folkloric legend performed and is moved,

Takkan’s voice grew quiet, and the last strains of his song were so soft that no one dared breathe. He lifted his lantern, its rich blue paper painted with rabbits and cranes and a silver moon...At last Megari strummed a final chord. As the silence lingered, I inhaled, feeling a gentle ache in my chest. Imurinya’s was a story of love and loss, so different from my own, and yet I couldn’t help but empathize. In her own way, she too was cursed, unable to go home (Lim 362-3).

Rather than pull this quote apart with critical analyses, I want to experiment by describing how it makes me *feel* as I read it: a soft bubbling of energy moves upwards through my chest, as I too, am moved by this moment in the text. A patchwork of memories from earlier parts of the novel when Shiori was still united with her family maps onto my own memories of my childhood that continue to lose their distinct form overtime, and instead take on new meaning as a collection of colors, sensations, and moods. Woven into this amorphous evolution of memories are the fantastical adventures of my favorite protagonists whose journeys of growth have become integral to my own series of movements that will continue to take me in unexpected directions.

I originally wanted to push forth the idea of a spiraling *Bildungsroman*, but as I moved deeper into my research, I realized that I no longer want to force anything upon these texts. My desire to pick them apart and take a critical look at them allowed for me to clearly move around the classic *Bildungsroman* and partake in a scholarly legacy that challenges White male presentations of growth. However, now, I want to let that critical mindset float away as I make the familiar movement inwards and then somewhere unnameable while I flip through the pages

to my favorite series. Following Bree and Shiori down their shrouded pathways, I find myself in communion with an enigmatic legacy of marginalized protagonists who make spontaneous and wondrously unknowable movements from their bathtubs, bedrooms, college campuses, oceanic settings, city buses, dining room tables, mythical worlds, fandom websites and beyond.

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