

Abstract

This thesis explores the concept of “wonderwork,” as defined by Canadian writer and literary critic Daniel H. Justice, within the context of the novel *Split Tooth* (2018) by contemporary Inuit author Tanya Tagaq. Wonderwork, a genre offering a fresh perspective on Indigenous speculative fiction, blends reality and unreality, rejects colonial stereotypes, and envisions a future distinct from the settler-colonizer narrative. This study examines the specific characteristics of wonderworks and how they are reflected in Tagaq’s novel.

The analysis utilizes a decolonial framework that prioritizes Indigenous perspectives. By conducting a close reading of *Split Tooth*, supported by Justice’s theoretical writings and relevant scholarly sources on Indigenous and Inuit literature, this thesis demonstrates that the novel successfully exemplifies the genre of wonderwork.

Split Tooth combines prose, poetry, and visual elements to narrate the coming-of-age story of a girl in 1970s Nunavut, Canada. The novel merges “the real” and “the unreal” elements into a unified narrative. The protagonist’s interactions with natural and spiritual forces, such as the Northern Lights, mirror her experiences in the realistic setting of the Arctic region. This interplay reinforces the novel’s cohesive structure. By portraying complex characters and their relationships with their identity, spirituality and surroundings, *Split Tooth* rejects simplifying settler-colonizer narratives. Additionally, the novel examines the interdependence of healing and pain, suggesting that the cycle of violence sometimes must be broken through violence itself to achieve balance and remediation. This process leads to the possibility of imagining an empowered future. These characteristics demonstrate why *Split Tooth* is an example of wonderwork.

This analysis highlights the multifaceted role of wonderworks in challenging traditional boundaries between reality and imagination and shows how contemporary Indigenous literature opposes dominant narratives, as Justice suggests. Recognizing *Split Tooth* as a wonderwork significantly contributes to understanding Inuit literature and the decolonization of Canadian literary studies.