

Adéla Černá
Wonderworks in Canadian Indigenous Literature: The Case of Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth*
BA Thesis
Opponent's Report

Adéla Černá's thesis explores "'the Canada' of Inuit literature, as depicted in the contemporary novel *Split Tooth* by Tanya Tagaq" (8). Described as "a multi-dimensional work that intertwines prose, poetry, and visual art to depict the life of a young Inuit girl in Nunavut" (8), Tagaq's novel is viewed as an example of what Daniel Heath Justice termed "wonderwork"; that is, a work of "Indigenous speculative fiction, centring Indigenous viewpoints and experiences while rejecting the dominant settler-colonizer narratives" (8).

Eloquently written and structured into three main chapters, the thesis opens with an introduction to Inuit culture and literature. Drawing on a broad range of scholarly sources, Černá acknowledges here the centrality of oral story-telling, mentions the flourishing of Indigenous cultures in the 1960s and the early 1970s, and highlights the work of notable authors of Indigenous literature such as Mini Aodla Freeman, Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk and Alootook Ipellie. Towards the end, she introduces Tagaq's work as a singer, performer and writer; a separate section focuses on an overview of *Split Tooth*.

Before proceeding to an in-depth analysis of Tagaq's novel in the third chapter, the thesis elaborates on the genre of wonderwork as a conceptual tool in the process of decolonization—generally and in the literary world particularly. Wonderworks, we read, with their shifting boundaries between the "realistic" and the "speculative," offer "new possibilities to explore the same themes of decolonization. Thanks to the non-real elements used within speculative fiction, they can complement or even challenge the established narratives and envision different realities than those non-Indigenous societies presume to be true" (29). With reference to Kirstie Goodfellow, Černá underscores three specific aspects of wonderworks: "They do not distinguish between 'the real' and 'the unreal'; they disrupt the stereotypical tropes about Indigenous peoples established by the settler-colonial imagery (such as the idea of Indigenous deficiency), and lastly, they are part of a broader decolonization process, offering the possibilities of healing and envisioning different futures" (32).

Clear as the description of wonderwork is, my first question nevertheless concerns the definition of the genre. Wonderwork is eventually linked in the thesis to magical realism and Indigenous futurism. Science fiction is not mentioned (although it is initially acknowledged that "many Indigenous authors find that the genres of fantastic, horror or science fiction give them new possibilities to explore the same themes of decolonization" [29]). In Černá's view, what differences are there between wonderworks and works of science fiction? It is suggested, for example, that in wonderwork "[t]he notion of 'wonder' suggests a feeling of mystery that captivates us. The experience of wonder might even be unfathomable, though not automatically dangerous or unfamiliar" (31). Is this notion of wonder different from the "sense of wonder" that has been used in various definitions of science fiction? Also, while I understand the potentials of wonderworks to challenge the limitations of mainstream, capitalist realism, (why) do they convey injustices of colonialism, violence and gender oppression, among others, more effectively than critical realism?

My second question for the defense relates to the third chapter, which is devoted to Tagaq's novel itself. While the interpretation in my view captures well how the cycle of violence is not broken through violence, there is little about the healing process, "the wide range of possibilities lying ahead" (57) at the end of the novel. What specifically are these possibilities?

Proposed grade: výborně.



Pavla Veselá, PhD.

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