

T A N Y A

T A G A Q



S P L I T

T O O T H

Split Tooth

Tanya Tagaq

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Longlisted for the 2018 Scotiabank Giller Prize

From the internationally acclaimed Inuit throat singer who has dazzled and enthralled the world with music it had never heard before, a fierce, tender, heartbreaking story unlike anything you've ever read.

Fact can be as strange as fiction. It can also be as dark, as violent, as rapturous. In the end, there may be no difference between them.

A girl grows up in Nunavut in the 1970s. She knows joy, and friendship, and parents' love. She knows boredom, and listlessness, and bullying. She knows the tedium of the everyday world, and the raw, amoral power of the ice and sky, the seductive energy of the animal world. She knows the ravages of alcohol, and violence at the hands of those she should be able to trust. She sees the spirits that surround her, and the immense power that dwarfs all of us.

When she becomes pregnant, she must navigate all this.

Veering back and forth between the grittiest features of a small arctic town, the electrifying proximity of the world of animals, and ravishing world of myth, Tanya Tagaq explores a world where the distinctions between good and evil, animal and human, victim and transgressor, real and imagined lose their meaning, but the guiding power of love remains.

Haunting, brooding, exhilarating, and tender all at once, Tagaq moves effortlessly between fiction and memoir, myth and reality, poetry and prose, and conjures a world and a heroine readers will never forget.

Split Tooth Details

Date : Published September 25th 2018 by Viking

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From Reader Review Split Tooth for online ebook

Krista says

Ice in lung
Ice in Wind
Life unsung
Milk Death
Split tooth
Sorrow marrow
Whispered truth

On her website, one can see the awesome artistic range that Tanya Tagaq displays – from “Punk Inuit Throat Singer” to painter – and in a further expression of her art, she has now released her fiction debut, *Split Tooth*. Self-taught at writing as she was at singing, this book is apparently based on journals that Tagaq kept over the years; journals in which she would write poems, ideas, memories, and short fictions. Put together in a loose narrative that I had to keep reminding myself wasn't a straight memoir, Tagaq paints a vivid picture of growing up in Nunavut in the 70's:

We break into abandoned buildings just to keep warm. We climb the oil tanks and run around the tops of them, daring ourselves to jump off (we never do). We challenge the power plant to a yelling match. We collect our friends in gangs and each one of us tells our parents we are sleeping over at someone else's house. We hold 100 metre races and play spin the bottle. We steal hash and beer and potato chips. We talk on the phone. We taunt drunks on the street, knowing they will never remember who bruised their egos when they have killed their own dignity already.

In between snippets of the continuing narrative, there are frequent semi-mystical/philosophical musings that may have been better off left in the journals:

Spirit is already divine. We must feed Divinity with devout intent and Spirit grows stronger, cleansing and returning to reality upon Death. What happens before birth and resumes after death – this is more real than the brief spark of life. Our lives just carry the physical burden of carrying energy forward. We put on suits of meat as training, as a challenge. We all know this is temporary.

And often, a short poem would appear that would perfectly and impactfully capture some details from the narrative:

The Human Sternum is capable of so many things
Protector of Diaphragm
Killer and milk feeder of hope
Marriage of marrow and cartilage
Heaving
Imprisoning the heart
Keeps it alive
Cage for Blood and breath
The Human Sternum is used for so many things
Clavicles like handlebars
Ribs like stairs
The sternum is the shield
Even when impaired
Even when it smothers a little girl's face
As the bedsprings squeak

The book also includes several line drawings by Jaime Hernandez, and as the girl in the story enters puberty, she has an encounter with the natural world that begins a storyline that sounds like it could have been an age-old myth. I liked this scrapbooky feel: it may not give the reading experience of a traditional Western novel, but who says that an Inuit artist needs to follow anyone else's rules for how to tell a story? There is both joy and pain in this story, and throughout, Tagaq writes of her community with warmth and love; my personal tastes may have appreciated some different editorial choices, but I am impressed by the art that Tagaq has created here.

Jessica Doyle says

A beautifully and honestly written memoir of Tagaq's childhood through teen years growing up in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. Split Tooth is a descriptive and at times uncomfortable read, but is a book any Canadian wanting to better understand the First Nations experience should pick up.

Emmkay says

As visceral and odd as I would expect from having listened to the music of Tanya Tagaq, an Inuk throat singer, who does experimental and interesting stuff. This novel, written in the first-person with a somewhat flat tone, interspersed with poems, tells the story of a young Inuk girl growing up in the 70s in a small community in Nunavut. I liked how economically Tagaq was able to convey Northern life and the effects of colonialism and abuse, from children taking advantage of 24-hour sunlight around the solstice, to their huffing for a cheap high. I found that had more impact on me than the broader observations about life and the universe. The tide of what I guess you'd call magical realism rises throughout, as the narrator recounts experiences, sometimes sexual, with the animals of the Arctic, the Northern Lights, the ice, and the sea. Weird and powerful.

Laura Frey (Reading in Bed) says

Somewhere between The White Book and Freshwater, a way of looking at birth and death and coming of age through the natural world and through myth. Hard to rate. Some moments of beauty (more than I got out of The White Book) but not much of a coherent story (unlike Freshwater) but a good companion read to both.

Ron S says

As with Ms Tagaq's live musical performances, this work is filled with unexpected twists and turns, sorrow and beauty, but the overwhelming impression is one of magic and awe.

Louise says

WOW! How did this book not make the Giller short list (along with Our Homesick Songs). I can think of a few short-listers that are much weaker. Listen to this as an audiobook, read by the author, and interspersed with her throat singing. Absolutely stunning, lyrical, poetic, mythical, and raw story-telling.

chantel nouseforaname says

Beautiful. Like insanely so. I don't even know what to say..it reads like part coming-of-age tale, part-poetic masterpiece, part fantastical, stream of consciousness sort-of purge. Her writing is super sharp; much like her music. Razor sharp and kind of awe-inducing.

Tagaq is coming for your neck with this book. There was some light playful elements and memories highlighting a life of childhood squabbles and things experienced much too young.. and there are horrific elements highlighting the unspeakable in words that are cutting but meant to be loudly heard and they are. The culmination stayed with me after the last page was swiped. This book lacerated me.

♥ says

I don't even know what to say about this.

I feel like I didn't "understand" half of this book, particularly the poetry, but I also feel like my mind just sucked everything right up and I somehow, naturally, just 'get it'.

I feel like I didn't enjoy reading this, but at the same time I'm grateful for having done so.

This book is powerful. It's strange. It's difficult. It's magical. It's sad and beautiful and jarring. It's a book I think as many people as possible should read, but I can't envision myself ever recommending it.

Tanya Tagaq is an incredible human being. One I've admired for a long time now... though she also kind of

scares the shit out of me. But in a good way. I think...

Carolyn says

This book defies categorization, being unlike anything I have ever read. This is visceral storytelling. It has been long listed for the Giller Prize. The author, Tanya Tagaq, is an award winning Inuit throat singer. If you are unfamiliar with her strange, unworldly music, I urge you to visit YouTube. There are videos of her performing, and most interestingly a video where she describes and demonstrates how she makes the various sounds in her music.

Here she paints word pictures ranging from the beautiful and rapturous to the disturbing and grotesque. The book contains snippets about a child and young woman growing up in the Far North. We learn something of their games, abuse, bullying, smoking discarded cigarette butts, liquor, drugs, solvent sniffing and love of animals. Mainly it contains poetry, visions, dreams, nightmares. There is homages to Arctic wildlife, nature including the cold and ice, the Northern Lights as a rhapsody. Good and Evil Spirits and dead ancestors permeate the spell cast by the writing. This book may not be for everyone but reading it was an unforgettable experience.

Chris says

In 2001, I first saw Inuit art – I mean real and in person. And, I fell in love with it. It was telling a story, even though I might not know what that story was, but it was still telling a story. So, I started to read up on the culture. I developed a taste for Inuit throat singing. Eventually, I heard about Tanya Tagaq, when she won the Polaris award. I got the album. “Uja” is one my all-time favorite pieces of music. When I found out that Tagaq had a book coming out, I had to pre order it.

Spilt Tooth is one of those fictional books that may, most likely, somewhat contains some non-fiction details. It chronicles the life of a young Inuit girl as she grows to adulthood. She lives in Nunavut. Eventually she becomes pregnant.

The novel is a thing of beauty. A combination of belief, myth, storytelling, heartbreak, nature, and poetry. There are so many beautiful images in this book – the stealing of a boy’s pants, the taking of an animal home, the foxes, the Northern Lights.

But there is harshness too because it is the North and life can be harsh. There is fear.

And the ending, oh the ending.

Leah Grantham says

Truth be told, I don't care for about half of the Indigenous fiction or poetry that gets taken up by CanLit. It's often overly cloying, or tragedy porn, or written with a white audience in mind, or sometimes it's just not my cup of tea. Split Tooth though, is none of these. Split Tooth is a brutal, unflinching, magical, beautiful, grounded beauty of a book. It belongs on the shelves of anyone who likes Chrystos or Eden Robinson or other authors who know how to (paraphrasing the book here) put their fingers in the membrane between the bone and fur.

It's not an easy read. It cracks open your clavicle and digs right at your heart. But in the process old wounds

that never fully healed get a new chance at honest renewal.

I seriously doubt this will end up being hyped or embraced by the CanLit establishment, but it's better than that. It stands on its own. It's a masterpiece.

Shawn Mooney says

Did 90% of this on audio and there was no possible way I could bring myself to endure the remainder.

Tagaq's breathy, incantatory audio narration works so powerfully for the incantational pieces here and there, and the throat singing was to die for, but she never ever varies that tone and it drove me up the effing wall listening to the most prosaic details of these stories told to me as if they were shamanic prayers. I am done.

Alex says

3.5 rounded up

Tagac writes beautifully and her background as a song writer comes through in the lyricism of the prose. She lays out an emotionally intense and personal story of an inuk experience, filled with mythical stories, raw and real violence and tragic life events, interspersed with her throat singing. Although at times the loose structure leaves the reader lost, the threads connect beautifully at the end.

Kevin says

Exactly what one should expect from a piece of Tanya Tagaq's work: a biting and poetic transportation into a new dimension... into a world familiar to few, but accessible to all through Tagaq's harshly honest ode to a girl's life in the North.

Monika says

This is unlike anything I have ever read. It defies language, convention, and any literary form. Genre-bending even feels like a weak description. This book comes out in September, and I highly recommend picking up a copy.
