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Literary Representations of the Far North through the Lens of a Canadian-Romanian Writer: *Pineapple Kisses in Iqaluit* by Felicia Mihali

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Summary: The Canadian North, close to the Arctic and the embodiment of the exotic faraway realm of ice and enigmatic inhabitants, is explored through the perspective of a Canadian writer of Romanian origin, Felicia Mihali, as depicted in her very recent novel *Pineapple Kisses in Iqaluit* (2021). Summarisable as the initiatic journey of a disabused French teacher in her thirties towards the happiness that she eventually finds in the least expected, most hostile environment imaginable, Iqaluit, the seat of the most northern French school in Nunavut, the case of this novel is quite interesting, as it was written in English and subsequently translated into French by its Romanian author. Thus, the issue of the multiplicity of perspectives and the culturally filtered perception of an exotic, unfamiliar, unrelenting landscape bearing upon the evolution of the female protagonist becomes the centre of attention, providing the opportunity to assess the symbolic meaning of the descriptive passages and their role in shaping the character's evolution. These landscapes making up the corpus under study take the most varied forms, from the wilderness to the urban area, the school environment, or the inserts referring to the polar expeditions in search of the Northern Passage, and last but not least, the Inuit folk tales.

Keywords: setting, description, multiculturalism, linguistic identity, attitude

Preliminary remarks

Pineapple Kisses in Iqaluit is Felicia Mihali's ninth novel, and the second to be written in English, after *The Darling of Kandahar* (2012). The author is Romanian, but she writes in three languages, notably Romanian and French, English being a later addition to her creative tools. However, the novels share more than the warm reception by critics and readers, namely the protagonist, Irina, whose romantic and existential tribulations constitute the guiding thread of the narratives. Another interesting aspect is that the novel was translated in French by the author herself, which makes it an interesting case of auto-translation, thus opening intriguing research vistas in this respect. Like the vast majority of Canadian novels, it bestows an essential role to the specific northern landscape, presumably because it is new and exotic to the readers, just like it is to the heroine herself.

Plot synopsis and characters

Irina, a 34 year-old teacher of French from Montreal, the girl whose photo in MacLean Magazine had earned her the nickname of the "Darling of Kandahar" and occasioned her to start sort of a tragic long-distance love story with Yannis, a Canadian soldier who does not survive the war in Afganistan, has to face the death of her husband and thus takes the bold decision to take up a temporary teaching job in Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, the northernmost province of Canada. In the new less than welcoming surroundings she faces all sorts of challenges, from the constant scrutiny of the small and closely-knit community, to the heterogeneous students who prove challenging to teach and relate to, most notably the 10 year-old Eli Ivalu, whose Inuit mother died two years before, and is now raised by her uncle, officer Liam O'Connor. Irina gets involved into a problematic relationship with him, in an attempt to heal old wounds and start afresh in new, albeit rather forbidding, circumstances. As the story unfolds and the city plunges into the arctic night, Irina discovers that Liam is not Eli's uncle, but her father, and what is more, a friend of Yannis', who served with him in Kandahar and was lucky enough to escape from the war theatre alive. When Irina unexpectedly gets pregnant, he opens up to her about his extremely complicated family life and manages to convince her to stay together and raise their future baby boy in Montreal.

The Role of the Landscape as an all-pervasive character

As is often the case in Canadian literature, the landscape often becomes a character in its own right, influencing the plot and deciding the characters' fate in extreme survival situations. The harsh climate and the rugged terrain prove challenging in most contexts, and they typically put the protagonists to the test. However, at a closer look, it becomes apparent that in literature it is almost

always the case that the outer setting reflects and influences the characters' inner states, in a constant mirroring of the external/internal existence that is equated to life itself. In any case, it is already commonly held that we should always be aware of "the importance of emotion as a driving force in the construction of landscape and the need to understand landscape not as something "out there," but rather as centrally concerned with the expression of self" (Bending 2015:1). So, it may be stated that landscape is of utmost importance in expressing what Canada means, and within this particular novel, in deciding what type of emotions it stirs in the characters, who are ultimately reshaped, emerging as new beings under its influence.

In this respect, as Lawson-Peebles put it, "Descriptions of the environment are never merely empirical. They are strategies which encode the interests and concerns of the writers as well as the physical nature of the terrain, the climate, and so on" (1988:6). In the novel analysed the extreme weather in the Far North can never be disregarded as a special type of setting, but at the same time it serves the writer's interest in describing the attitude and emotions of her characters.

In the inspired words of another female writer, Tanya Ravenswater, who also wrote about the North, albeit the Irish one, "as its attributes are described and gradually revealed in more detail – physical features and qualities, history, associated memories, strengths and vulnerabilities – the landscape assumes the weight and dimensions of a substantial character in its own right. Here there is an otherness which will act and be acted upon; a reality with the power to steady and uplift; an authentic force to be reckoned with" (2021:1).

The Landscape as contrast: expectations vs. reality

As expected, there is an obvious contrast between expectations and reality, as boredom and listlessness seem to have followed the protagonist on her move to a fresh start far away from home and the familiar surroundings of Montreal. In her case, location may also be seen as dislocation, as she is now placed in a completely new and often hostile, even deadly environment. In a stark difference from the anticipated excitement of the new job, the heroine has to face the dull, vaguely menacing reality. The first encounter with the new city focuses on the visual imagery, where the dominant colours are brown and grey, sometimes disrupted by the `gaudy` hue of a parka. This human element, metonimised as a piece of clothing in a hostile, monotonous environment, seems utterly out of place and thus the landscape ascends to a position of superiority, slowly pervading the subsequent development of the plot as the eternal latent character, always to be taken into consideration, impossible and even dangerous to ignore.

In addition, the descriptions of landscape give rise to a plethora of intertextual references which occur quite early in the story, requiring quite a wide general culture from the part of the reader in order to grasp all the subtextual nuances (Kafka, Frobisher, Bescherelle, to name just a few, appear in no more than a couple of lines), and obviously hinting at the multicultural background of the writer reflecting through the protagonist's conscience upon the newly found territory.

From the very start, the reader is immersed into superlatives, as Iqaluit is described as "a place that had no other counterpart beyond the Arctic Circle", "the most northerly francophone outpost in the world" (p.1), an "eternally frozen land" (p.2) where Irina hopes to find "better company", and a "less boring" environment. Despite the lure of the mermaids' song, the excitement of the unexpected, and the endless realm of possibilities, the new place is characterized by a pervasive sense of outer solitude matching and deriving from the inner state of the heroine, a solitary person by nature.

The first impressions are quite disheartening, utterly contradicting the heroine's horizon of expectation; thus, the landscape focuses on the dimensions of the harsh seashore setting, adding to the ominous atmosphere. There is a combination of olfactory and visual images replete with negatively-marked terms:"the unexpected odour of putrid algae and saltwater" and "the smell of the ocean, the drizzle of rain and the sticky fog" (p.2) is paired with "the dust, staining the land a dark-brown" (p.2) and "the dull hues" (p.3) in perfect concord with Irina's state of mind.

The most striking figure of speech is provided by the simile pertaining to the sea imagery on page 3: "the whole city seemed like an abandoned ship, beset in the ice". This powerful image seems to be the leitmotif of the novel, as it occurs repeatedly in order to describe the school community, or the city community at large. In the final pages of the novel, when Irina's perspective becomes clearer and most of the plot has already unfolded, the simile turns into metaphor, and the entire city is seen as a lonely ship navigating the rough seas of the Far North: "[…] the vessel that was Iqaluit, into which people from all over flowed. The Northwest Passage to this destination was still open and people continued to search for the shortest way to a better shore" (p.287).

In addition, the picture is completed by livresque references, like the "Kafkaesque housing castle" where the heroine is supposed to reside during her stay, as well as by economic considerations, as Iqaluit is "the most expensive city in Canada" (p.5).

Of course, the human element is no more welcoming, as the community she has chosen to be part of is rather censorious and tightly knit, not easily available to new-comers, who typically do not stay for the entire year they are supposed to. Ana, the "matriarch" of the French school, the most senior member of the staff and the more experienced authority figure to enter Irina's life, makes further sombre predictions about the impending polar night, about to plunge the entire city into darkness, on a factual, as well as figurative level. So, the perspective of a six-month night and the warning about the serious somatic manifestations of this lack of direct sunlight increase Irina's anxiety and add to her difficulty in finding her own place. The author's detached style, almost resembling a clinical presentation, is easily visible in the following excerpt:"This was not a light-hearted chat about an odd phenomenon but a warning about the polar night causing sadness, detachment, lack of energy, excessive sleep and difficulty concentrating. Many people developed full-blown depression after moving here" (p.8). However, despite her shyness and wariness around new people, Irina manages to maintain her composure, and fully embarks on her teaching mission, trying to do her best to help the children in her class, despite the various obstacles in her way (unqualified teaching assistants, disabused colleagues, lack of Francophone linguistic background and complex family situations for most students, etc.).

A. Landscape as generic representation

It is no surprise that the adjective that the generic descriptions of the place, in addition to superlatives, repeatedly resort to the adjective *barren*; thus Nunavut is "the most barren region ever inhabited by man" (p.55), and the characters feel lost in the "the barren, god-shrouded land of Arctic gravel beaches" (p.192).

In contrast, the landscape is often described in culinary terms: "[…] the sea became like a thick grey **soup**. Then it coalesced to form **pancakes** of ice that thickened into rafts" (p.101). As a matter of fact, since everything is reduced to the essentials, food and everything related to it acquires prominence; non-sophisticated, simple food is equated to survival, and there is frequent mention of the obvious differences between indigenous dishes and the type of food eaten by non-natives: "This is the country of meat and fat. In fat you've got all you need to survive" (p.138). It is not devoid of meaning that the Far North food loses all its hedonistic dimensions, boiling down to ingesting the nutrients, almost all the time in a less than appealing form, but able to sustain life. In this respect, it is most likely not a coincidence that the set-phrase which metaphorically covers all the resources of the arctic region in the eyes of the European explorers is none other than "the fat of the land".

The feature that identifies the North is its "otherness", which makes it inaccessible and incomprehensible by outsiders, and gives rise to all sorts of negative feelings and false perceptions: "History books rarely mention the North. There is a different Canada here, difficult to map, a state of its own with its own **resentments** and **apprehensions**" (p.156). The reluctance of the outside world to gain a genuine, truthful view of this territory leads to the unfair treatment of its native inhabitants, to injustice and discrimination: "The poorly known North had once again become the target of illusions and prejudices" (p.191). The Far North is not as much a physical location, but a cultural construct affected by ignorance and misunderstanding.

Yet Iqaluit is subject to inevitable change, and the traditional ways are gradually being replaced with the modern ones, originating in the cultural mosaic of the immigrants: "Taxi drivers represented the new face of the Iqaluit community, no more a world of igloos, whalers and seal hunting, but of migrant stories" (p.193).

B. Landscape as the urban environment

Quite a large part of the novel is dedicated to the description of the city itself, as it is the main setting of the novel. The descriptions depict quite a small and humble location, with a few architectural landmarks, among which the "igloo-shaped roof of St. Jude's Cathedral", the busy harbour, the schools, the canteen, and the post-office. Due to its northermost location, the city grants a central place to the post-office building, a kind of nucleus able to ensure the communication with the rest of the world. The lexical choices used in the description of this utilitarian building are quite suggestive, hinting at the precarious condition of the inhabitants: "**narrow labyrinth** at the post office,

where about three thousand PO boxes adorned the walls like a **columbarium**, with letters in place of **cinerary urns**" (p.16).

The pre-eminence of the natural landscape over the human element is symbolically illustrated by the fact that the city only has one bench: "It was white, large and comfortable. The tide pushed the waves right up to the bench's feet, and when they retreated, people picked out oysters from under the rocks, stashing their catch in huge pails" (pp.19-20). Humans and the natural forces like the sea coexist in a fragile balance, yet nature manages to provide sustenance to the inhabitants.

The general impression is humble and devoid of any glamour, and everything has a strictly utilitarian purpose: "paved streets […] rocky slopes among the small houses and wooden garbage boxes. As there were no fences in Iqaluit, I could get as close as I wanted to the houses, their entrances protected against the wind by a piece of cloth" (p.23). The lack of fences may be construed as a sign of freedom and communal unity, but it may also hint at the scarcity of material possessions typical in this part of the world.

The harshness of the wilderness pervades the streets of the city in the shape of the fight for survival embodied by the incessant dispute between ravens and stray dogs for the scraps of food left in the garbage by humans: "The other window overlooked a small lane where ravens and dogs were often fighting around the garbage boxes" (p.23).

Yet, despite the severe weater conditions, the atmosphere is animated by the continuous movement of trucks and boats: "[…] big trucks went relentlessly to and fro on Niaqunngusiariaq Street. […] Small boats were busy carrying freight to shore all day long" (p.23).

The pervasive feeling of secrecy and opaqueness, characteristic of the Arctic landscape that eluded discovery for so many centuries, is visible in the existence of services that are "hidden in various small rooms at the back of gas stations and corner-shops". The multifacetted role of the same building is proof of the necessary resourcefulness and economy of means that such a setting requires.

Yet the urban landscape consists of much more than what meets the eye; it hides many secrets making up its covert identity that proves overwhelming to the unprepared protagonist: "My colleagues were also in a rush to fill me in about the city's many secrets. I had never heard so many stories in such a short amount of time. History, geography, politics, secrets, they all came to me at once" (p.24).

Despite its small size, the city is still challenging to its inhabitants, who have to constantly adapt to the severe natural conditions and "The city was small, yet too big to walk from one end to the other in a single go. The neighbourhoods were scattered over the area, separated by rocky hills and small valleys. They were called the Plateau, Legoland, Happy Valley. The streets were more often curved than straight, making the drive easier during the winter blizzards when tires could not bite into the ice on the sharp slopes" (p.31).

One of the most powerful descriptions of the city locked in its icy cage is occasioned by the aftermath of a blizzard: "The houses looked as if they'd been dipped in creosote, floating in a crystal ball. People were living in a state of siege, haunted by perpetual danger coming from all sides. The air was foamy with ice frost. It was unbreathable, harsh. I had never before experienced that eerie feeling that people could die so easily and so mercilessly. We were living in a ghost city, without a human being in sight for hours on end. Cars went down the streets in a cloud of exhaust fumes" (p.143).

C. Landscape as the school environment

The school environment first appears as novel territory as well, which is unsurprisingly less glamorous than expected (pompous French names like La Grande Salle are given to anodine rooms), governed by new rules that Irina still has to learn, and populated by a handful of teachers, mostly unqualified and regarding their teaching job as a temporary diversion while waiting for something better, and unruly children of mixed backgrounds with a very limited knowledge of her subject. The school is just another example of an impenetrable community that Irina has to understand and try to become an integral part of. The children normally regard teachers as sort of relatives in a superordinate community, which makes the typical rapport between teacher and student acquire a different dimension, making the protagonist's adaptation even harder. The school per se resembles a safe haven of sorts, where humans are sheltered from the harsh weather outside.

D. Landscape as mythos - Inuit folk tales

The very first narrative related to Greenlandic mythology is the frightening account of the death of an inequitable grandmother taking advantage of the hunting skills of her blind grandson, who is dragged to open sea by a wounded whale and turns into a black whale herself, with her swirling hair

transformed into the tooth of a narwhal. The powerful story of the punishment inflicted by the grandchildren on the unjust authority figure evinces the importance of community integration and family ties, the absolute need for survival skills, and last but not least, the harsh, potentially deadly setting against which the entire story unfolds, in Northern myths, as well as the present reality. Thus, it may well be said that cruelty and the all pervasive presence of death is a given of the land, just like depicted in mythology; the narrative resonates in Irina's mind with what she was casually told in the teachers' lounge, hinting at the inexorability of death, the supreme power of the elements holding all living beings at their mercy, in a genuinely nerve-wrecking image of the landscape: "A few years before, a sudden frost trapped a dozen narwhals in the bay. A police unit had to shoot them all to prevent slow death by starvation. Until the next summer, the ice remained a domino of blood-red patches" (p.43).

Another myth revolves around the story of the ogress Amautalik, "an ugly best feeding on lost children", who unsurprisingly is Eli's favourite character, drawn in every grotesque detail.

The constant threat posed by the unforgiving setting in myths as well as in real life is perhaps best summarised in Irina's reflection: "Legends thrived on old apprehensions, a sense of danger, a longing for security. When food was scarce, everybody had a role to play in maintaining the chain of fragile life" (p.53). This quotation groups together the main topoi of life in the Arctic: everything is reduced to the basics of survival in a hostile, potentially lethal environment, viz. providing food and security for the fragile human beings in the face of ancestral fears and the constant sense of danger.

Inuit myths are as as inexorable as life itself, focusing on the clearcut opposition between the human element and the outside world: "Violence and death were omnipresent in the local legends as a legacy of an ancient mythology where blood, starvation and cruelty were inescapable. Nature and animals were but predators, a deadly coalition against humans who stubbornly resisted. Under the never-ending threat of the elements, people sometimes turned against each other, men against women, grandmothers against grandchildren, kids against orphans. The Inuit myths offered no judgment and no punishment" (p.54).

E. Landscape as the background to polar expeditions

The same contrast between expectation and reality seems to lie at the very foundation of the origins of the town. Deceitful appearances, brutally crushed expectations and mistaken/ assumed identities prove to have always been part of the local environment, marked by death, despair, and distrust of the natives from the very discovery, as well as by resistance to revealing itself to the white explorers; in a way, Irina is like one of the European explorers trying to discover a novel territory, replete with renewed hope and lots of riches (in her case, not material, but spiritual):

"I wondered if this was the place Martin Frobisher called the *Meta Incognita*. At the end of the sixteenth century, he was the first British explorer to have come this far, searching for a passage to China. He entered the small bay carved into the shores of this island, which he took for a passage to the Pacific Ocean. Reality soon confronted him when he realized he was not on route to anywhere tropical. Unwilling to go back to England empty-handed, he loaded some black ore and one native hunter, who would eventually die, onto his boat" (p.20).

This landscape is unforgiving, keeping its secrets for hundreds of years, punishing even the slightest human mistake by death, and newcomers should be extremely cautious:

"Many of the explorers who tried to cross the Arctic Ocean above the sixtieth parallel found their end here from the cold or starvation. Some of them died because they were not paying attention to what kind of boots and clothes they should wear or what tinned food to bring on board; others, because they did not trust the local people. At this latitude, following rules set by the British Admiralty was a sure trip to a deadly end. Given that the British Empire's guidelines favoured clothes made of rubber ground cloth over fur garments, no wonder it took four hundred years to chart the Canadian Arctic Archipelago" (p.20).

The price of discovering more territories in the North is perhaps the highest of all geographical discoveries, claiming many lives: "For the many explorers who followed in his footsteps, the North remained a tragic land. Most came hoping to uncover great secrets but found only sad ends to their lives" (p.38).

The gap between expectations and reality is revealed in Irina's later ponderings upon her rather unsuccessful efforts to become part of the hermetical Iqaluit community, occasioned by the brief recess provided by the Christmas holiday she spent with her mother in Montreal: "In September, I had imagined our school as one of those Victorian vessels, carrying among the ice floes a team of people

aiming for the same goal. The knowledge those British crews acquired during the **horrific years of the expedition** created a rare solidarity among them in the face of t**he unforgiving Arctic**. Yet, the overall evidence proved that life in the North didn't necessarily bring people together. The solidarity I expected had vanished, eked away by **the unspoken competition for power**" (pp.128-9). It is interesting to see how she feels like a solitary polar explorer in her futile attempts to understand an alien world governed by strange laws so different from the South. Just like the early British explorers, in search of prestige and fortune, the uprooted humans who seem to end up in Iqaluit, at the confines of the world, are still plagued by their habitual weaknesses and shortcomings, thus spoiling the possibility for a new, untainted beginning.

The passages dealing with the polar expeditions occasion perhaps the most profound reflections on human nature in the whole novel, constantly making the outer landscape mirror the inner one; the Far North is a strange realm where all masks fall off, all barriers give way, and the humans stranded there are stripped naked of any polite appearances that might hide their genuine core: "In the explorers' time, the worst enemy was not the weather, but the risk of mutiny. Humans are a mutinous species and the North amplifies their worst instincts" (p.254).

It is interesting to note that the very ending of the novel focuses on the Northwest Passage as a sort of regaining access to a long ignored ancestry, in search of the fundamental values making up the character's most intimate identity. Thus, Irina's unborn son will someday retrace the steps of his parents in the Far North in search of his own truths and values: "The only thing I could count on was that, one day, my son would start his own search for the Northern Passage" (p.298).

Multilinguism in landscape depiction

It is quite an interesting peculiarity of this novel that it was first published in English, then translated in French by the author, who is Romanian, viz. benefiting from a triple linguistic perspective. The fact that the writer is Romanian puts the source language and the target language on equal footing, Although the translation may be assessed as fairly faithful in most cases, one may note several adaptations which may prove relevant to the thesis that code-switching does affect the perspective and tone of the description. To begin with, adaptation starts from the very title, *Pineapple Kisses* turning into *Une nuit d'amour*; even if the erotic component is obvious, its intensity and finality is different, being stronger in French than in English. The *pineapple* reference is omitted in French, being replaced by the rather clichified *nuit d'amour*. Of course, the other unifying element is the geographical reference, the exotic Iqaluit which plays such an important role in the story as a whole.

Translation, equivalence and multilinguism itself are quite important in the literary canvas of the story, as language, the main meaning bearer and provider, pervades the story on multiple levels, from the very beginning. Thus, the interplay between English, French and Inuktitut are in fact the very representation of the identity of the Canadian land, and thus shapes the evolution and the relationships developed by the characters on more than one occasion: Irina is a French teacher who embarks on a fractious relationship with Liam O'Connor of Irish origin, and is supposed to teach French to his Inuktitut-speaking niece Eli, in a mixed-race community at the far end of the world, where she feels awkward and estranged. Linguistic identity may well be said to shape the characters' view of the world and general outlook on life, and code-switching entails much more than merely linguistic phenomena. The reference to the name change of the setting itself, i.e. the English Frobisher Bay to the native Iqaluit, `a place of many fish`, stands proof to the constant identity challenge of the people living here.

Of course, the constant switch between the two main languages used in Canada, English and French, a peculiar phenomenon in its own right, reflects the identity struggle of the inhabitants, and parallel the heroine's tribulations in her journey to find herself and forge a new path, redefining her own identity in a completely novel location. In this particular case, it is interesting to note that on a metaliterary level the novel itself was subjected to the same code-switch (the translation from English into French) by its own creator.

Irina's love interest is initially identified by his origin manifested linguistically; from the very beginning she is sharply aware of the gap between their backgrounds: "I was suddenly intimidated by his **Irish** accent, but mostly I was embarrassed by my own. I was too tired to control it. In Montreal I spoke mainly **French**, but here I relied on **English** every time I had to ask for services. The effort it took to focus my thoughts and the sight of his holster in my tiny classroom were exhausting me" (p.19).

Multiculturalism is undoubtedly one of the main points of interest in the story, and the references to Irina's epistolary love affair includes another nationality into the cultural mix: "I felt I could not love him because he was **Greek** and my parents were distrustful of Greeks" (p.22). The quotation is relevant for the type of mentality to be commonly found in most communities, but the author, an immigrant herself, through the protagonist's intermediary, voices the belief that tolerance and inclusion are the only way for the future: "As young Canadians, Yannis and I should have doubled down on a vision for the future. Our duty was to create new meaning and propel ourselves forward" (p.22).

Code-switching is also visible in the presence of many culturally-bound terms belonging to the native language, such as *ulu* (cutting instrument), *angakog* (healing shaman), *amautik* (traditional hood), etc., whose role is to impart verisimilitude and colour to the story, putting the natives on equal footing with the rest of the inhabitants of Iqaluit.

As expected, the chapters foreshadowing the denouement bring forth another important language, viz. identity to the already heterogeneous cultural mix, Romanian. It is no coincidence that this is the author's mother tongue, and it is at this point that it becomes even more clearer that Irina is loosely based on the writer herself, with her Romanian mother and Hungarian father, raised in cosmopolitan Montreal, fluent in French and English, and teaching in a school in the north of Canada. The chance realisation that Ana, the matriarch of the school community and the glue that tied it together, minimising conflicts and enhancing the sense of belonging within the teaching staff group, is of Romanian origin suddenly strengthens the bond between the two, even if it is right before Ana's demise. In this particular case, the Romanian language is transposed into Ana's gastronomic memories from childhood, and this culinary identity that resurfaces as she is drawing closer to death is the

It is also noteworthy that even Irina's mother, the Romanian immigrant with a meandering life story and two broken marriages, manages to find her Ithaca in the new relationship with a Craiova-born industrialist. All these circles of life now seem complete, with a final return to the origins.

Conclusions

The laudatory reviews of the novel, predominantly referring to its powerful evocative power and non-biased, direct, unadulterated evaluations of the community and the environment in the Far North, undoubtedly underline the author's ability to write in a believable manner, able to keep a fine balance between captivating her readers and presenting a nuanced, yet true-to-life description of the Canadian setting, with all its peculiarities and oddities. Expressing herself in a foreign language learned as an adult, the author undoubtedly manages to achieve the precision and razor-sharp analysis of the characters' attitudes and states of mind as reflected in the landscape. Cultural awareness is also another key point in the success of the novel, as the mix of nationalities and languages mentioned in the story as part of the atypical communities in Iqaluit is unique in itself, promoting equality and unity in diversity: English, French, Romanian, Inuktitut are placed on equal footing, each of them bearing the entire identity structure of the individual speaking it.

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