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Style and Themes in The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey

Bachelor thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná práce se bude věnovat románu *The Snow Child* autorky Eowyn Ivey(ové).V úvodu práce student s využitím relevantních odborných zdrojů stručně uvede dobový a literární kontext a zvolený román do něj zařadí. Dále charakterizuje pojmy, s nimiž bude pracovat (realism, magic realisms, narrative style, setting, ad.). Jádrem práce pak bude analýza románu, v níž se student zaměří na témata, motivy, narativní styl (prvky magického realismu, vztah k pohádce, Aljaška jako dějiště, apod.). Své vývody opře o odborné zdroje a doloží ukázkami z díla. Závěrem své analýzy shrne.

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Ivey, Eowyn. *The Snow Child*. Little, Brown and Co., 2012.
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Leech, Geoffrey, and Mick Short. *Style in Fiction*. 2nd edition. London: Pearson, 2007.
Levy, Keren. 'Darkness in Literature: The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey [book review].' *The Guardian* 27 Dec 2012.
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Prohlašuji:

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Annotation

The bachelor's thesis examines the novel “The Snow Child” by Eowyn Ivey and its use of myth in modern literature. It focuses on the ways in which the author constructs an ambiguous narrative and portrays the process of coping with personal loss using mythology elements. This analysis contributes to the discussion on the enduring function of myth as a significant interpretative tool in literature.

Key words

Folktale, Magic realism, Ambiguity, Grief and healing

Title

Style and Themes in The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey

Anotace

Bakalářská práce se věnuje románu “The Snow Child” spisovatelky Eowyn Ivey a jeho využití mýtu v moderní literatuře. Zaměřuje se na způsoby, jež autorka využívá ke konstrukci mnohoznačného děje a jimiž vykresluje proces vyrovnávání se s osobní ztrátou pomocí mytologických prvků. Tato analýza přispívá k diskuzi o přetrvávající funkci mýtu jakožto významného interpretačního nástroje v literatuře.

Klíčová slova

Pohádka, Magický realismus, Mnohoznačnost, Zármutek a uzdravení

Contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the novel “The Snow Child” (2012) written by Eowyn Ivey. The author draws inspiration from the Russian folktale “Snegurochka” (The Snow Maiden), which she intertwines into a realistic setting. Folktales have long served as an important and widely spread genre that explores human origin and experience while being passed down through generations, evolving and being reshaped over centuries.

The novel intricately weaves myth and reality together, raising the question of how the myth of Snegurochka influences Ivey’s adaptation and what purpose it serves within the narrative. This study also seeks to answer how the interplay of genres affects the novel’s ambiguity and thematic richness. Additionally, it analyzes the myth’s influence on the novel’s characters’ emotional journeys from grieving to acceptance. Ultimately, this research discovers how “The Snow Child” demonstrates how myth can be reimagined in the modern literary context.

To answer these questions, this study employs close literary analysis and myth criticism methods. First, it establishes the novel’s literary context and the necessary terminology. Then, through examining key passages featuring supernatural events and their connection to crafting the novel’s layering of ambiguous meaning, the analysis will explore Ivey’s narrative techniques and their role in shaping the plot. Finally, the role of the myth in the narrative will be discussed in relation to its symbolic significance and practical influence on the plot’s progression and resolution.

By examining these topics, this thesis also aims to contribute to discussions regarding the possibilities of shaping and adapting mythology into modern forms that can explore complex (not only) emotional themes while maintaining a significant aesthetic value, highlighting the continuing relevance of folklore in contemporary storytelling.

The Snow Child in Literary Context

Eowyn LeMay Ivey is from Alaska, where she still resides with her husband and two daughters. Her first novel, "The Snow Child" (2012), was a finalist for The Pulitzer Prize[1]. With her third novel published recently (as of March 2025) and multiple short essays and publications in various newspapers in the past, Eowyn has grown to be a famous writer.

She and her family often go to rural areas, thanks to her husband's work as a fishery biologist, and therefore spend a lot of time in the Alaskan wilderness, where both she and her husband grew up.[2] Her origin and present way of life heavily influence her writing – the three novels released so far are all set in rural Alaska.

"The Snow Child" tracks the life of a middle-aged couple, Jack and Mabel, who move to Alaska to find a new direction in life. Devastated by the loss of their stillborn child and the inability to conceive again drives them away from their home and family to lead a more peaceful life. In the middle of nowhere, they purchase a piece of land, settle down, and start working tirelessly to make a living. They are aware life there will not be easy, but little do they know how much the Alaskan wilderness will challenge them physically and mentally.

This nearly 400-page novel takes the reader to the 1920s Alaska. Its main plotline is based on the myth of a Snow Maiden originating in Russian folklore. This mythical figure first appears in written form by a librarian and archivist, Alexander Afanasyev, in his collection of Russian folk tales.[3] Since then, numerous adaptations and retellings of this tale have been made. "The Snow Child" by Eowyn Ivey is one of the most recent ones.

Initially, the Russian folk tale, "Snegurochka" (the Snow Maiden), was transmitted orally, and according to Ruth Hibbard, it was only written down for the first time in the second half of the 19th century.[4] The story is very varied; in some versions, Snegurka spawns from a chunk of snow as a result of somebody's desire; other times, she is the daughter of the Snow King, etc.

The tale has been adapted and retold many times by authors of different origins in over a hundred years. In 1873, the play Snegurochka by Alexander Ostrovsky was presented for the

[1] in 2013 and became a bestseller with over 1 million copies sold in 25 languages. "Bio", Eowyn Ivey, Accessed November 2024, https://www.eowynivey.com/bio

[2] Eowyn Ivey, "Bio."

[3] "A Shifting Snow Maiden", Ruth Hibbard, December 2015, https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/a-shifting-snow-maiden?srsltid=AfmBOopa8MbpdJ2bmq25TyJnzZj66q0ix2WrxZIDmFyftKWHul9i8lVH&doing_wp_cron=1731682043.0061199665069580078125

[4] Ruth Hibbard, "A Shifting Snow Maiden", Victoria and Albert Museum blog, December 2015,

first time. Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov composed an identically called opera in 1881. In the Soviet era, the figure was incorporated into the New Year celebrations and became a symbol of the festivities.

The most likely first case of the Snow Maiden myth translated to English appeared in 1874 as an instance in John Theophilus Naaké's collection of Slavic tales. This collection is a mix of tales from different Slavic countries, which, as the author believed, had never been translated into English before its release.[5] The collection also includes stories by bohemian authors K. J. Erben or J. K. Tyl.

During the Russian Revolution (1917-1923), an Englishman, Mr. Arthur Ransome, stayed in St. Petersburg. Besides his journalistic duties, he was very invested in folklore, eventually leading him to the Snow Maiden tale. Over his life, he wrote a number of Russian (but also other) fairy tale adaptations, translations, and retellings. His work made Russian folklore more available to readers in Europe and beyond.[6]

After the testimonies of rich Russian folklore reached the West, many authors became interested in it, particularly in the case of the Snow Maiden. In most versions of the myth, the story follows a predictable line: a childless couple creates a little girl (a snow maiden) from snow, and she mysteriously comes to life. However, her existence is fragile, and she eventually disappears through one of several recurring motifs: she plays too close to a fire and melts away, feels unloved by the couple and leaves, chooses mortal love, or vanishes with the arrival of spring. Over the years, different literary approaches were applied to the myth. Traditional, such as Ransome's version, gave way to modernist interpretations like Edith Sitwell's poetic adaptation and later to postmodern and feminist reimagining by Angela Carter. In recent years, the story has continued to inspire new adaptations, including film productions, literary works like Eowyn Ivey's "The Snow Child", and even a ballet performance.

In conclusion, The Snow Maiden has emerged as an orally transmitted folktale, and thanks to numerous translations and retellings by characters like Afanasyev, Naaké, or Ransome, it evolved into a widely popular and adaptable story that has endured over centuries while being reshaped to reflect the era and the author's perspective. While many adaptations and retellings follow familiar patterns, Iwey's novel stands out as unique by expanding the myth over hundreds of pages in an unprecedented novel, offering a layered and complex narrative.

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[5] John T. Naaké, Slavonci Fairy Tales: Collected and Translated from the Russian, Polish, Servian, and Bohemian. London, 1874. Preface.
https://books.google.cz/books?id=omQWAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR3&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=snow&f=false

[6] Tatiana Bogrdanova and Asya Usmanova. "Arthur Ransome and Dmitri Mitrokhin: Translating the Russian Folktale". (2016): 18,19. https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2016-2-3-14-21.

Fairy tales and mythology have long served as foundational storytelling traditions. They shape cultural narratives and reflect human experiences. Eowyn Iwey's "The Snow Child" reimagines the Russian folktale Snegurochka (The Snow Maiden) and weaves fairy tale motifs like transformation, spells, and a sense of wonder into a historical, realistic setting and enriches the tale with psychological depth and ambiguity, bridging folklore with modern literary tendencies. Eowyn cleverly combines the folktale with realistic and magic-realistic approaches and offers an insight into the main characters' minds, whether it is their struggles, dilemmas, or moments of healing and appreciation. Written with the use of many devices and aspects of magic realism, yet still allowing for a realistic interpretation, the novel blurs the boundaries between the two literary methods, so the reader may interpret the plot in their own way.

In this thesis, several literary terms will be used repeatedly. It is necessary to clarify their meaning to set up a foundation for the analysis and ensure consistent understanding throughout the work. This section will serve as a reference for key terms, which provides clarity and will help to avoid confusion as the thesis progresses.

"The novel" is a literary work written in prose. It is of a greater extent than, for example, a short story and usually provides a more detailed plot where characters evolve. As Abrams and Harpham suggest, predecessors of novels originated in ancient Greece (long narrative romances) or later in sixteenth-century Spain (picaresque novels)[7]. Novels are mostly works of fiction. However, some can be based on real characters or in real settings. Some examples are The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco and In Cold Blood by Truman Capote. Novels aim to entertain or provoke thought in a broad audience of readers. They delve into topics such as morality, human relationships, or the complexity of life itself.

"Realism" can be distinguished in two major ways: first, as an art movement in the nineteenth century, represented by writers such as Honoré de Balzac or George Eliot; second, to describe a recurring approach in literature across different time periods and genres, focused on depicting human life and experiences in a realistic manner.[8] In other words, realism is ,,evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist and that such things might well happen"[9] This thesis will use the broader meaning unless explicitly stated otherwise.

In the work "A Glossary of Literary Terms", "magic realism" is described as a literary genre in which magical elements are woven into a realistic environment, which creates a unique

[7] M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 11th edition (Cengage Learning, 2014), 253
[8] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 333
[9] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 333

narrative „… representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements…"[10]. Magic realism originated in Latin American literature, with authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende being widely recognized for their contributions to the genre. Themes in magic realism often include, among others, social issues, racial, gender, and class identity.[11]

"Myth, mythology and folktale" - all three terms are closely related. A myth is a single instance of a story from mythology, which is a compound collection of ancient tales about supernatural beings (gods, demi-gods, and other creatures). They were once believed to be true and helped people explain „why the world is as it is and things happen as they do"[12] (e.g. Greek mythology). Meanwhile, stories that involve supernatural beings which are not gods and are not part of a formal mythological system are typically categorized as folktales.[13] The term "folktale" is often interchanged with "fairy tale".

Alexandra Berlina's essay tackles the issue of explaining the terms "ambiguity" and "polyvalence". The Latin prefix "amb(i)" can mean: „both, as in 'ambidextrous,' and around, as in 'ambience.'" In other words, ambiguity means the ability (of a text) to be interpreted in multiple ways. Some definitions mention "multiple meanings", but those more selective mention "double meaning".[14] This thesis will explore "The Snow Child's" ambiguity in its multiple possible interpretations and their effect on the character's viewpoints and journeys as well as on the reader's comprehension.

The term polyvalence, in relation to literature rather than chemistry, is closely related to the ambiguity of meaning. Berlina departs in her thoughts from the duality of natural and supernatural and presents an idea of an abundance of interpretations rather than choosing from just two. Her idea is called "fantastic polyvalence", and it explores the layering of possible meanings of written text.[15] In sum, polyvalence in literature refers to a writing's property of offering multiple possible meanings and interpretations, contrasting with the limitations and possible confusion of the term "ambiguity".

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[10] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 258

[11] M.-E. Angulo. 1995. "*Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse*, 1st ed.". Introduction, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315864280.

[12] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 230

[13] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 231

[14] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Snow Child.'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26, no. 2 (93) (2015): Charting the Fantastic. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26321111.

[15] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Snow Child.'" 238

The term "intertextuality", popularized by Julia Kristeva, as Abrams writes,[16] refers to the many ways of interconnectedness between a text and other texts and contexts. This can happen through explicit or subtle citations and allusions, the repetition or transformation of earlier works' themes and forms, or simply by participating in the same language and literary traditions. According to Abrams and Harpham, every text is essentially an "intertext"—a point of intersection where countless other texts meet. A text gains meaning and significance only through its relationship to these other texts.[17] In The Snow Child, intertextuality appears on multiple levels: through clear inspiration from the Snow Maiden myth and its variations, direct acknowledgment of literary works and figures like Arthur Ransome, and its engagement in broad literary genres like realism and fairy tale. The upcoming analysis examines the specific ways Ivey refers to other texts and authors and her reasons for doing so.

As Wendy B. Faris points out, "narrative style" can be defined by the characteristics of the narrative - the narrative techniques and cultural issues that authors use to tell a story.[18] The characteristics emerge from narratology and are concerned with the types of narrators, narrative devices, or analysis of discourse.[19] Dupriez's "Dictionary of Literary Devices" lists the various devices authors use to shape a story and narrative. It includes terms such as ambiguity, point of view, or irony.[20] Ivey employs a number of these devices, which will be discussed in the analysis.

In regards to the literary and period context of "The Snow Child", it is important to categorize the novel into the literary genres and methods it employs. According to David R. Shumway, a novel can be identified as "realist" if it meets most or all of certain criteria, such as the depiction of ordinary characters, detailed descriptions, and plausible, believable situations.[21] "The Snow Child" fits this definition by focusing on the lives of a professor's daughter and a farmer, surrounded by a community of similarly ordinary people. Ivey frequently describes the settings in vivid detail, allowing readers to imagine their house and surroundings. Despite the supernatural aspects of the novel, which will be discussed in the following passage, the

[16] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 398
[17] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 398
[18] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), accessed via Google Books, 4
[19] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 234
[20] Bernard M. Dupriez, *A Dictionary of Literary Devices: Gradus, A-Z*, Translated by Albert W. Halsall, (University of Toronto Press, 1991), 28, 128, 49, Google Books.
[21] David R. Shumway, "What Is Realism?" *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 9, no. 1–2 (2017): 183–95. https://doi.org/10.5250/storyworlds.9.1-2.0183, 184

characters also experience realistic situations. These include the everyday struggles of survival, hard work, broken bones, hunting, and more.

"A Glossary of Literary Terms" describes "magic realism" as a genre where fantastic elements and fairy tale inspiration are woven into a realistic literary work.[22] Jeffrey Wechsler points out the complicacy of defining the literary genre throughout the twentieth century. He then goes on to explain that imaginative arts have rather flexible borders, making their main common denominator a shift from reality.[23] Arnason writes: "In general, the magic realists,…, create mystery and the marvelous through juxtapositions that are disturbing even when it is difficult to see why. The magic realists, even though they may not indulge in Freudian dream images, are interested in translating everyday experience into strangeness."[24], highlighting the difference between magic realism and surrealism. Iwey exemplifies this definition in "The Snow Child" by Faina's (the name of Iwey's snow child) strange origin, behavior, and matter-of-fact appearances next to realistic, ordinary characters such as Jack and Mabel.

However, as Alexandra Berlina points out, in classical magic realism, the supernatural is usually not treated as concerning or shocking, while in "The Snow Child", there is surprise and guesswork visible in the characters of Jack and Mabel, which hints toward the novel's positioning on the intersection of multiple genres[25] - this thesis identifies these as realism, magic realism, and folktale.

The term "postmodernism" refers to art emerging after the Second World War (1945) when society was greatly shaken by the recent happenings (mass destruction, technological advances…).[26] Evolving from the modernistic approach of seriousness and high art, postmodernist authors use techniques such as genre-blending, playfulness, absurdity, intertextuality, etc.[27] Eowyn Ivey's novel is a blend of realism and folktale (magic realism). It contains intertextual elements (references to the original tale of the snow maiden, reference to Arthur Ransome…) and also concerns individualism, different points of view, or multiple possible interpretations, and challenges societal or tabooed issues (economic struggle, infertility).

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[22] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 258
[23] Jeffrey Welscher. "Magic Realism: Defining the Indefinite." *Art Journal* 45, no. 4 (1985): 293–98. https://doi.org/10.2307/776800, 293
[24] H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, (Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1977), 37
[25] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Snow Child.'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26, no. 2 (93) (2015), 244. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26321111. 243
[26] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 227
[27] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 228

Fairytaleness and Realism: Blurring the Boundaries

This chapter explores how Iwey's reimagination of the folktale and her narrative style challenge the border between reality and the supernatural and their effect on the characters' and the reader's perceptions. The term "fairytaleness", constructed for the purposes of this thesis, refers to the novel's use of strange and magical events in the story. It highlights how the novel includes fairy tale elements to blur the boundaries between what is real and what is not.

Following this analysis, the section Grief and Healing will examine how the interplay of genres serves to highlight contemporary authors' tendency to address taboo or underexplored topics such as mental health, grief, and infertility, while provoking an inner reflection in the reader.

A Note from Eowyn Ivey at the end of the book tells the reader about her inspiration to write her own Snow Maiden myth-inspired novel. She came to discover a retelling at a bookstore where she worked, which, she says, led her down a delightful path of exploring the various adaptations. Ultimately, her research led her to Arthur Ransome's "Little Daughter of the Snow", to which she appoints the highest significance, stating that without Mr. Ransome, she would have never created her own Snow Child.[28] Iwey also highlights the works of Freya Littledale's "The Snow Child" and Lucy Maxym's tale "Snegurochka" as her inspiration.[29]

Before "The Snow Child", the tale primarily existed in the form of folktales, children's picture books, or, as mentioned earlier, theatrical plays and operas. Iwey's writing stands apart in an important way: it is one of the first full-length novels to reimagine the Snow Maiden myth. Unlike older adaptations, which keep the tale simple or symbolic, the novel format allows for a deeper exploration of the myth and gives space to fully develop the themes of parenthood, grief, and the relations between humans, nature, and the supernatural.

Ivey takes a different approach to telling the tale as opposed to most retellings. Instead of presenting the story as a brief, magical event with a clear resolution, she introduces ambiguity and emotional depth. Faina's existence appears neither fully magical nor fully human, blurring the line between folklore and reality. The story stretches over multiple years, allowing the mysterious girl to grow up and evolve rather than vanish in a single definite moment. With the use of numerous fairy tale structures and reassuring revelations, which tend to even out consistently, Iwey shifts the focus from supernatural events to human relationships,

[28] Eowyn Ivey, *The Snow Child*. (Headline Publishing Group, 2014), p. 313, Adobe Digital Editions
[29] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 310

experiences, and individual journeys. She depicts the couple's past trauma of child loss and their grief and coping processes, which are very dynamic in combination with Faina's mysterious and volatile presence. The novel also delves into parenthood and the challenges of raising a child. In addition, the plot is set in a 1920s Alaskan wilderness, anchoring the novel in a real place and time and adding psychological depth to the story. The realistic depiction of the characters and surroundings makes the story "believable" and keeps not only the reader but also the characters themselves hoping and wondering if the inevitability of the Snow Child's demise could be avoided.

Although Ivey's novel differs significantly from traditional retellings of the myth, it remains faithful to the core elements of the folklore and keeps its sense of mystery. In fact, the novel's key points and conclusion align with the tendencies found in other adaptations, preserving the essence of the original tale. Ivey's approach makes the story feel timeless and personal and demonstrates the possibilities of the evolution of such myths.

As mentioned above, Ivey has been influenced by various writings and authors, which provokes an exploration of the novel's intertextual properties. Her Snow Maiden tale is deeply connected to the earlier adaptations. Ivey does not just draw inspiration from these – she actively weaves them into the novel, referencing them directly within the narrative, creating a dynamic dialogue between past and present storytelling.

After Mabel finds out about the little girl's existence[30] (unlike other adaptations of the myth, Jack and Mabel do not witness the "transformation" from snowman to a live Snow Maiden and only get to see her in the next days), she remembers a book she once owned – but can only remember its vague physical descriptions and a few images. After writing her sister to inquire about it[31] and waiting for months for it to arrive, she finally receives it.[32] Interestingly, rather than being a part of Afanasyev's "The Poetic Outlook on Nature by the Slavs", the book in the novel appears as a standalone picture book written in Russian. By including a tangible version of "Snegurochka" in the story, the author subtly suggests the fictitiousness of the myth, reinforcing the feeling of a realistic plot. Ivey does not specify the author, only the name "Snegurochka 1857", suggesting that this detail may be a fictional element with a playful role in the narrative while paying tribute to the myth's Russian origin and folklorists.

Besides his place in the Acknowledgments and the author's note, Arthur Ransome also directly plays a role in this novel. He is the scholar Mabel's sister consults in order to retrieve

[30] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 53
[31] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 78
[32] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 106

the book, explaining the origin and sharing some information on the myth, which she then forwards to Mabel.[33] Without such information, the plot probably would not have taken the same path, which may be Ivey's clever way to highlight Ransome's important role in helping to spread knowledge of Russian folklore in the West. Ivey even cites a line from Ransome's own retelling.[34] His repeated essence in the novel highlights both his importance to the author and his contribution and connection to the genre.

There are other authors mentioned in the novel, this time as authors of some of the books Mabel owns. Ivey writes about Mabel inspecting her bookshelf and stumbling upon Emily Dickinson's "Poems," Frances H. Burnett's "Queen Silver-Bell," and Henry D. Thoreau's "Walking."[35]. Mabel also owns John London's "White Fang"[36]. These works share themes of nature, survival, and spirituality. Their presence in the novel not only reinforces its key elements but suggests what may have motivated Mabel, the daughter of a professor, to seek a life in rural Alaska, besides the author's personal bias.[37]

Aside from direct references to authors and writings, The Snow Child participates in literary genres of folklore, (magic) realism, and fairy tale, and because of its themes of nature, self-trust, and self-reliance, as Abrams hints,[38] also in American transcendentalism, and possibly others.

"The Snow Child" demonstrates a wide engagement with intertextuality, as Iwey draws inspiration from a variety of literary influences. Through explicit mentions of authors, allusions to classic folklore and literary works, and participation in various genres and contexts, the author reinforces the novel's connection to the myth while also setting a realistic tone. By weaving these texts and traditions into her novel, Iwey enriches the narrative and invites readers to think about the interplay between myth, reality, and playfulness.

Advancing forward, this section examines the indicators of the supernatural in the novel and its ambiguous relationship with realism, emphasizing the many layers of meaning embedded in the literary work. It aims to analyze the supernatural elements and fairy tale structures and tie them to the everpresent layering of realism and myth with the use of Alexandra Berlina's essay "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and 'The Snow Child.'", in which she presents the idea of "fantastic polyvalence" and exemplifies "The Snow Child" as an

[33] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 109-110
[34] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 12
[35] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 52
[36] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 158
[37] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 35
[38] Abrams and Haprham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 410

instance of a polyvalent story using fairy tale to draw a deep and thought-provoking plot. Ultimately, it will summarize the influence of mysticism and the ambiguity it brings to the narrative and explore how it shapes the characters' perceptions, actions, and relationships and contributes to the novel's thematic richness and emotional depth.

One of the main themes in Eowyn Iwey's novel is its relationship with a fairy tale and myth. The author uses elements of magic realism to create tension between reality and fantasy, basing the plotline on the original Russian folktale Snegurochka. The novel is rich in ambiguity thanks to Iwey's method of constructing its "fantastic polyvalence" based on shifting perspectives, supernatural features, and omission of definite evidence of any of the possible interpretations.

As previously mentioned, ambiguity refers to the capacity of something to hold more than one meaning. However, defining ambiguity can be problematic, as it raises the question of whether it implies a mere duality (double meaning) or a variety (multiple meanings). In response to this issue, Berlina introduces the term "fantastic polyvalence", which describes the potential for a literary text to support more than just two interpretations. She compares the theory to Tzvetan Todorov's rigid, binary framework, which strictly differentiates between the natural and the supernatural.

Berlina argues that this approach is insufficient for literary analysis of some works, as it overlooks the full spectrum of possibilities that fantastic polyvalence allows. She argues that a more complex perspective offers several advantages: 1) depart from the rigid, "categorized" approach, preferring intratextual compatibility (different viewpoints), which creates an open dialogue between characters' and readers' fluctuating perceptions, 2) embracing metaphorical interpretation, 3) the possibility of more numerous interpretations than a dichotomic[39] system allows.[40] Basing her proposition on two novels, Iwey's "The Snow Child" (2012) and Michael Cunningham's "The Snow Queen" (2014), Berlina examines how these works construct polyvalence and applies her theoretical framework to their analysis.

After a short introduction to the story, Berlina delves into some of the novel's supernatural or strange elements, such as the absence of footprints leading to the location where the couple created the Snow Child, Faina's flawless language, or sudden snow storms. However, as she notes, her natural existence cannot be entirely dismissed.[41] (As she guides Jack to her father's deceased body and shows him where she lives when she's not with them or hunting…). Berlina further examines the novel's establishment of both "fairy-tale" and "realistic" worlds,

[39] Choosing between two distinct alternatives
[40] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *237*
[41] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *244*

arguing that these two dimensions are so intricately intertwined by a continuous stream of new information, often disrupting the current "status quo", so that the reader is constantly presented with shifting perspectives, leading to different interpretations with each turn of the page.[42] One thing remains constant throughout the story: the reader is never presented with Faina's own perspective, which would offer the most reliable information.

Berlina goes on to examine the information presented about Faina's origin., proposing ten different possible interpretations, which, as she claims, are all equally supported in the novel[43]. These range from facts (the girl is human and found a way to seek help, or she is a magical product of their longing) to beliefs (the girl is human, but the couple - or one of them - believes in her supernatural origin, or she is a mythical being, but the couple wants to believe she is real…) to more abstract notions (her presence's metaphorical meaning to Jack and Mabel, their manifestation of her becoming their daughter…). The sheer variety of interpretations alone reinforces the idea of the fantastically polyvalent structure of the narrative and demonstrates that categorizing Faina's origin as purely natural or magical would limit the depth of ambiguity, richness, and interpretive possibilities. Berlina continues her exploration by analyzing the Snow Maiden's uncertain demise in a similar manner. Faina gives birth to a child that she conceived with a man she fell in love with, but she falls ill, developing a fever. She asks to be taken outside to be in touch with the snow despite the raging snowstorm outside. Suspecting a sepsis, they let her lay outside with Mabel by her side. As Mabel falls asleep and experiences a strange dream, Faina disappears. Her clothes are found where she had been lying, covered in snow and buttoned up. Berlina proposes several possible explanations: given the state of the clothes, Faina could have melted or disintegrated into a chunk of snow, suggesting she was a Snow Maiden (although she had spent the whole summer with the family and only disappeared when it actually started snowing again). Alternatively, she might have undressed and fled into the forest, perhaps overwhelmed by her illness or unable to adapt to family life, though this would not explain the clothes left behind—if she were a mortal, she would surely have frozen to death. Has Faina fulfilled her function to bring a child and hope to an estranged, grieving couple? The differing perceptions of the characters further support the ambiguity. Mabel, devastated by yet another tragedy in her life but also familiar with the Russian myth, is inclined to believe that Faina has magically disappeared.[44] In contrast, Faina's husband spends the following days and weeks searching for her in the forest, convinced she must still be out there. Berlina asserts that

[42] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *244*
[43] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *245*
[44] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 300

this level of ambiguity engages readers, making them more alert and receptive to the "impossible", encouraging them to find and associate meaning in details that might otherwise be dismissed as mere coincidences or overlooked entirely.[45]

To summarise, Berlina's analysis and application of her proposed concept of the fantastic polyvalence in "The Snow Child" demonstrates the novel's interplay between supernatural and realistic elements and emphasizes how their ambiguity offers many interpretations and viewpoints. She manages to present equally plausible explanations that vary greatly in meaning, highlighting the novel's refusal to commit to a single, definite reality. Berlina notes how Iwey uses viewpoint to reinforce the uncertainty, keeping readers engaged. Overall, her approach not only embraces the novel's layers of meaning, but also broadens the discussion on fantastic literature and offers readers an insight into shaping their own experience with a text.

The following section of the thesis highlights and examines the key passages in "The Snow Child" that incorporate magical elements and fairy tale structures, focusing on their role in the novel's ambiguity and their impact on the narrative. Berlina's concept of fantastic polyvalence provides a useful framework for understanding this interplay between reality and fantasy. However, the analysis also considers how these elements function independently within the text and shape an individual's perception, both for the characters and the reader. Ultimately, this chapter explores how the myth-based narrative choices contribute to the novel's layered meanings and encourage multiple interpretations.

After a snowball fight on the first night of snow, Jack tells Mabel that "they are too old for this," to which she responds with, "Are we?".[46] They are talking about a snowball fight, but this interaction might hint towards the possibility that they might not, in fact, be too old for many things (the snowball fight did indeed happen and made them happy), offering the notion that perhaps even fulfilling their long-lasting hope of having a child could be possible, even if not the natural way. Mabel then suggests building a snowman, marking the first parallel of this novel with the original folk tale Sneguroshka.[47] The snowman they build is small, about as tall as a child. They provide the snowgirl with much detail. Their "childish" retreat brings them joy and love. They spend an intimate night, something they haven't done in a long time, indicating

[45] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *245, 246*
[46] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 42
[47] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 44

that the child they made of snow figuratively helped them find a thread of connection yet again.[48]

Jack wakes up at night, and he sees a little girl running across their land through the window. Her appearance is similar to the snowgirl they built. After walking outside, he finds that the snowgirl, scarf, and mittens they provided the snowman with are gone.[49] In the morning, he finds footsteps starting at the snowman's remains. Alexandra Berlina acknowledges this is the first mystical element in the novel, disrupting the fifty-page-long realistic flow. This detail suggests Faina's supernatural origin due to the lack of footprints leading toward the site, suggesting she must have "spawned" there. Soon enough, the plotline evolves into a twist of realism and a fairy tale, often changing perspectives and leaving the reader on their toes on the question of what is the "correct interpretation".[50]

The first sighting of Faina by Mabel[51] carries out another, as time tells, supernatural element. It appears that whenever Faina is upset or doesn't want to be seen, suddenly, a snowstorm approaches[52] (51,…). Berlina admits most, if not all, of such phenomenon may be subject to the characters' imagination or a coincidence, contributing another layer to the ambiguity of this novel.[53] While discussing the child with Jack later, Mabel asks if he had heard anything in town about a missing child. Jack replies that he hasn't and assumes the girl must have returned home or that someone would have come looking for her. At this point, they both believe in her natural origin, but each holds a detail that could challenge this assumption - Mabel recalls a book she once read with her father, where similar events occurred, while Jack remembers the absence of tracks leading to the snowman they built. Even in these early pages of the novel, both the characters and the reader sense that something is not quite right, without having anything more than a notion as evidence.

Jack and Mabel face the hardship of lack of food and money. In order to survive the winter, Jack must hunt down a moose, which brings him no luck over many days. One day, Jack decided to attempt shooting a moose for the last time. If this didn't work, he would've gone to work in the mines.[54] Only then, after many days of struggle, Faina appeared in the forest, leading Jack to an easy kill. It may be a coincidence or a fantastical salvation of a man at the end of his hope. Either way, Jack would have ended up in a mine without her, leaving Mabel

[48] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 46
[49] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 47
[50] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'" *244*
[51] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 51
[52] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 51, 125, 194, 237
[53] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'", 244
[54] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 56

all by herself in the middle of winter, possibly injuring himself, or worse, which can be interpreted as a notion of the novel's fairytaleness, thanks to the seemingly coincidental encounter with the child in the forest. The circumstances of Faina's appearance in the forest are rather strange. She appears out of nowhere and doesn't say a word to Jack. Instead, she starts running through the forest, with Jack naturally following her. Somehow, she knows that Jack is looking for a Moose, and she just casually knows where to find one. Jack doesn't seem to question how that is possible, but rather, he admires her precise knowledge of the wilderness. Ivey's description of Faina's abilities, which Jack does not have access to, again offers a notion[55]– rather than stating how Faina hunts and what exactly her knowledge is, Ivey writes: „She moved through the forest with the grace of a wild creature. She knew the snow, and it carried her gently. She knew the spruce trees, how to slip among their limbs,…"[56] To the reader, this description suggests a deeper, metaphorical meaning beyond Faina's physical abilities. Ivey portrays her as a being in harmony with nature in a way that sets her apart from ordinary humans. She could be a skilled hunter but also embody a supernatural connection to the wilderness, further blurring the line between reality and fairy tale.

Jack and Mabel's friends, the Bensons, pay them a visit at their homestead, and Mabel asks Esther Benson if she has heard anything about a missing child. After Mabel describes what she has seen, Esther expresses doubt that a lone girl could survive in the forest, gently suggesting that Mabel might be experiencing "cabin fever", since Mabel spends most of her time indoors, stating: „You start seeing things that you're afraid of…or things you've always wished for"[57] Mabel, feeling dismissed, insists on what she has seen and looks to Jack for support, only to find him staggering, suggesting that what they saw could have been anything.

This moment highlights the contrast between Mabel's and Jack's perceptions – this time not about the girl's origin, but rather her sole existence. While Mabel is sure of her experience, Jack is reluctant to admit he has been seeing her as well, aligning more with Esther's rationality and creating the impression that he is uncertain, even though he likely shares Mabel's belief (for the next day, he tries to lure the girl with food). For the reader, this exchange reinforces the feeling of ambiguity in the novel and raises additional questions: could Jack and/or Mabel be "hallucinating" this entire time? What effect would this have on the plot? How is this going to be resolved?

[55] existing as a suggestion
[56] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 61
[57] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 70

Later, Jack tries to "lure" Faina with food, which he leaves on a stump near the forest,[58] bringing him no luck. Instead, he brings a gift, a small doll, which he sets on the same stump. Upon Jack's reaching their cottage, a window freezes rapidly. As Mabel inspects the frozen glass, she notices the girl looking at her from outside.[59] When Jack walks out of the door, no one is found. Sure, she is a child and may be able to run quickly, and the freezing may have been caused by the steam from washing clothes. The next day, in the morning, they find a basket filled with blueberries on their doorstep and the doll is missing. This moment highlights that Faina is not in need of food and is capable of taking care of herself, but lacks sentimental value, longing for something deeper: connection and companionship. The fact that she immediately takes the doll suggests that, while she noticed the food, it was the sentiment behind the gift that mattered to her.

Her matter-of-fact appearances also draw attention to Faina's seeming ever-presence, which further underscores the feeling of her mysticism. On multiple occasions, she appears to guide the characters through the forest when they get lost;[60] to say her thanks, as in this particular chapter; help them – when Jack hunts for the moose;[61] or simply want to talk to her[62] – even though not always. Berlina explains the depth of the story's polyvalence by stating: „Even if every one of these details was explained "realistically", their accumulation could hardly be ignored."[63]

Then Mabel remembers the Russian book again and questions Faina's origin. If such a book can exist, is it possible for such a child to exist? Is it possible that they created her? Mabel believes that her appearance is identical to the snowgirl they built with Jack on the first day of snow, and now she believes the girl is a magical product of their longing for a child.[64] Attempting to reconnect with the story that now seems interconnected with her own life, Mabel writes to her sister, asking for the book, which she recalls as a beloved part of her childhood.[65] This act suggests that Faina's existence, whether real, imagined, or supernatural, reflects the tale Mabel once cherished, suggesting that longing and belief may have the power to shape reality itself.

[58] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 73
[59] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 75
[60] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 239
[61] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 60
[62] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 243, 249
[63] Alexandra Berlina, "Fantastic Polyvalence beyond Dichotomies: 'The Snow Queen' and '*The Snow Child*.'", 244
[64] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 78
[65] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 78

The eleventh and twelfth chapters mark a significant step forward – Faina stays at Jack and Mabel's for dinner. She does not speak, and seems to get too warm inside and leaves.[66] As days go by, Faina appears randomly without warning. In chapter 13, Faina trusts Jack enough and makes him promise to help her. She leads him up to the forest to unveil a corpse of a man – her father.[67] Jack takes days to dig a grave to properly bury the man. After finding out Faina had parents, Jack is swung towards the belief that she is no mystical creature. When it is time for Faina to say her goodbyes, she flings her hands into the air, and plenty of snow scatters and falls on the grave to cover it. Jack doesn't seem to notice, but the reader is put in front of an important decision: to believe in Faina's natural origin or her supernatural qualities. When Jack inquires about the man in town, he finds out he seemed like a solitary type with no family, raising doubts about the actuality of Faina's relatedness with the man.[68]

The beginning of Part 2 marks a turning point in Mabel's perspective. She finally receives the book from her sister and a letter offering insight into the myth. It reveals that in every version of the tale, the snow girl ultimately disappears - a realization that weighs heavily on Mabel. However, her sister's words introduce a new possibility that we can invent our endings and „choose joy over sorrow"[69]. At this moment, the reader's memory is still fresh with Jack's burial of Faina's father. Yet, this letter shifts the focus - not toward confirming Faina's supernatural nature, but toward the idea that Mabel, and perhaps even the reader, can embrace a different narrative. Rather than resigning herself to an inevitable tragedy, Mabel is offered the possibility of shaping her own story, introducing a layer of hope that challenges the determinism of the myth. She practices her sister's suggestion right in the next chapter (16), when they run out of chicken feed and have to slaughter their hens.

Arthur Ransome's adaptation of the myth "The Little Daughter of the Snow" is incorporated in the consulted ebook.[70] The retelling involves a fox – the animal that offers the Snow Maiden a safe passage home after getting lost in the forest.[71] The fox requires one of the old couple's hens as payment for delivering the girl back home. The poor couple tricks the fox instead, sending their dog to scare it away. After that, their snow girl leaves them, thinking they don't love her enough to sacrifice a hen for her safety. In Ransome's retelling, the fox, therefore, plays a crucial role in the narrative. Ivey also incorporates a fox in her story, marking a parallel

[66] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 89
[67] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 94
[68] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 95
[69] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 109
[70] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 314-320
[71] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 318

with yet another adaptation of the folktale – only in Ivey's novel, the fox is somewhat of Faina's companion.[72] By now, both the reader and Mabel are aware of the possibility of the fox's importance to Faina's fate.

Without anyone asking her to do so, not Faina, nor the fox, Mabel reserves one of the slaughtered hens for her fox, bringing it to the edge of the forest, demonstrating her determination to leave nothing up to chance and rather sacrifice a hen in vain rather than give up the hope that this act could change what Mabel believes might be inevitable. Jack thinks about what Esther said about the cabin fever, clueless about the book's existence and Mabel's reasoning behind her actions.

One day, Faina and the couple make snow angels.[73] Mabel gets her hopes up because now she finally has evidence of the maiden's existence for Esther to see, unless the wind blows the snow angels back into shapeless dents in the snow.[74] The next days are calm without wind. Only when Esther is on her way to visit Jack and Mabel, it begins snowing and winding rapidly, covering the snow angels so that they are irrecognisable. There is nothing to show anymore.[75] Perhaps it is a coincidental snowstorm, which is nothing unusual in Alaska, yet still, the timing seems a bit too precise to cover the evidence of Faina while simultaneously preserving the snow angels for Mabel for as long as possible to cherish and to reinforce her belief.[76] The importance of Mabel's belief becomes more apparent in the next chapter – Grief and Healing, where it is shown that it is the belief that sets the events of dealing with the couple's trauma in motion.

Faina approaches Mabel in the first week of April, urging her to come outside. Mabel is surprised it is snowing even now, at the beginning of spring. Faina holds a snowflake in her bare hands and makes Mabel draw it for her as a goodbye gift, which shouldn't be possible due to the body heat. For Mabel, it is a moment when her belief in the supernatural origin of Faina is strengthened as she witnesses something "magical" right in front of her.[77] She even suggests they should go inside their cabin to finish the drawing, only to realize the snowflake would disappear due to the warmth.

Faina gives Mabel her goodbyes and a kiss and dashes into the forest, as the snow changes into rain. Mabel knows she is leaving, just like a Snow Maiden would with the arrival of spring.[78] Ivey makes the child leave precisely at the last moment of the winter's snow,

[72] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 121
[73] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 123
[74] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 124
[75] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 126
[76] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 124
[77] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 132
[78] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 134

signifying her deep connection to the changing seasons and reinforcing the novel's recurring theme of temporariness. As the snow turns to rain, Faina's departure feels inevitable, as if she belongs to the winter and can not exist beyond it. This moment leaves Mabel and the reader wondering whether Faina was ever truly meant to stay.

Feeling melancholic about Faina's departure, Jack decides to visit the grave he dug last winter.[79] As he calls for her and reflects on the past, he recalls the small door in the mountain where he once saw Faina enter. He decides to investigate and discovers a hidden room carved into the rock.[80] There are no toys or children's clothes. He comes across a parka filled with moonshine bottles, likely from Faina's father. Further exploration leads him to the discovery of a wooden box containing a pink baby blanket and photographs of Faina and her parents. The doll that he once gifted her is absent, leading Jack to believe she must have left with it.[81] Sorrowful, he leaves. This occasion further deepens his sense of Faina's humanity, in contrast with Mabel's point of view. Mabel maintains her perception of Faina as a mythical being who has vanished with the winter. At this point in the novel, Jack and Mabel's perspectives are significantly diverse, creating uncertainty for the reader, who is left navigating between their conflicting interpretations. Moreover, neither Jack nor Mabel is fully aware of the other's beliefs or the information they have available, due to their lack of communication.

If the novel is, at its core, a retelling of the Snow Maiden myth, then it preserves the essence of the original tale - one that brings elements of wonder and the fantastic into everyday life, attempting to interpret answers to ultimate questions.[82] This raises the question of whether Faina's existence could function as a narrative device rather than a literal reality, whether realistic or supernatural. While Mabel interprets Faina in the context of the myth she is familiar with, drawing connections between the book and their experiences, Jack explores her existence in a more pragmatic perspective - he has tangible proofs of her existence, such as the photographs, her father's clothing, and the blanket. The distinction between what is revealed to Jack and Mabel individually may reflect the psychological needs of each character: Mabel, longing for hope and the fulfillment of her maternal needs, embraces the marvelous, while Jack, seeking reassurance and a sense of purpose as a protector, provider, and father figure, finds validation in concrete evidence. In this sense, Faina may serve as a mythical mediator, guiding both characters on their path toward healing and personal transformation.

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[79] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 136
[80] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 138
[81] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 139
[82] Zsolt Virágos, "VERSIONS OF MYTH IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE." Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok / Hungarian Studies in English 17 (1984): 55. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41273807.

Throughout the summer, due to Jack's inability to work the fields after being crippled by an accident, Mabel works hard to make ends meet. She still thinks about Faina, inquiring if Esther's son Garret found any footprints and if he had caught an orange fox; she makes Faina a new coat, believing she will return with the winter, and fights Jack about it, who is rather skeptical.

With the first proper snow of the winter, Faina returns to the homestead, looking worn out and tired.[83] While Mabel is pleased and calm, helping Faina to clean up, Jack is very confused. Drawing from the tangible proofs he found in Faina's room and looking at her "desperate appearance", he insists she stays with them for the night since there is a snowstorm raging outside. Ultimately, Faina leaves anyway, and Jack and Mabel get into an argument. For the first time, Mabel tells Jack about the book "Snegurochka" and presents her beliefs to Jack.[84] Defusing her conviction, Jack shares his experience with burying Faina's father, telling Mabel about Faina's family and home. This completely turns Mabel's perspective, ripping her beliefs away from her. Raging, she runs into the snowstorm to attempt to catch up with Faina.[85]

However, she gets lost and desperate in the snowstorm and is only found by Jack hours later, freezing. After he starts a fire and helps Mabel warm up, they have a talk about their miscarried baby and the struggles they have been through because of this tragedy.[86] For the first time in ten years. Moreover, for the first time since Faina's appearance in their lives the previous year, they are on the same page and talk openly. Again, it is the first snow of the winter that brings them closer, just like in Chapter 4, deepening the sense of the novel's fairytaleness. As the beginning of winter marks a turn in seasons and Faina reappears in their lives, Jack and Mabel experience a turn in their relationship as well.

Mabel's transition from believing in Faina's mysticism to being withdrawn from those beliefs can be examined through Ven Gennep's theory of "The Rites of Passage", which outlines the processes of life crises and personal transformations as their results. The framework distinguishes ,,three major phases: separation, transition, and incorporation."[87] The rites follow a universal structure, with transitional periods holding their own significance, sometimes becoming distinct phases of their own. The physical movement, such as crossing thresholds,

[83] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 176
[84] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 180
[85] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 183
[86] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 190
[87] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Intro. Solon T. Kimball. (The University of Chicago Press, 1960), vii, https://archive.org/details/theritesofpassage/mode/2up

often symbolizes a shift in social status or a shift in personal perspective.[88] While Van Gennep primarily applied this concept to main life events, such as marriages, childbirth or funerals, it can be reduced to other experiences.[89]

In "The Snow Child", the snowstorm Mabel endures searching for Faina, who has shifted in her eyes from a fantastic creature to a mere, vulnerable child,[90] can be interpreted as a rite of passage. Her transformation from her old beliefs to a new reality is marked by physical and emotional struggle, aligning with Van Gennep's transitional phase. The storm serves as both a literal and symbolic threshold she must cross, stripping Mabel of illusion and ultimately forcing her to confront change alone and loss with Jack by her side. Emerging from it, Mabel reaches a new understanding, not only of Faina but also of herself, her past grief, and her relationship with Jack.

When Mabel practices her new understanding of the girl, suggesting she go to school, have her clothes washed, and insists she should stay at their home, Faina resists and seems to start to distance herself from the couple.[91] When Faina flees, Jack witnesses something extraordinary: Faina turns back to the cottage and gesticulates with her hands, making the snow whirl, and suddenly, from a calm, windless night, a large snowstorm erupts.[92] Unable to fall asleep, Jack reminiscents what he saw and decides to browse the Russian fairy tale book. When Mabel appears, he hesitantly acknowledges the uncanny nature of Faina's existence, saying,: „It is strange, isn't it? The child we made out of snow. That night…"[93] This moment marks that Jack's perspective has shifted. Once clinging to practical explanations, Jack has finally begun to acknowledge the possibility of something supernatural. At the same time, Mabel, who previously saw Faina as a mythical being, seems to have embraced her humanity almost entirely. The short-lived agreement in their perspectives underscores the novel's refusal of any fixed interpretation, while continuously inviting the reader once again to question what is real and what is magical.

Chapter 32 is dedicated to Faina showing Mabel her "home" in the forest and mountains. She shows her how she obtains food by catching wild animals in traps and explains her methods and knowledge. Mabel understands now that this is her true home.[94] On one hand, Mabel sees that the girl does not simply vanish into the snow when she leaves their cabin; on the other

[88] Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage, x*
[89] Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage, viii*
[90] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 192
[91] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 192-194
[92] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 194
[93] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 196
[94] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 203

hand, she feels something new. As nightfall approaches, northern lights appear over the mountains, creating a strong and vivid atmosphere. The scene adds a sense of the ethereal, reinforcing that while Mabel now acknowledges Faina's physical reality, there remains something almost otherworldly about her presence.[95] Rather than abandoning her belief in Faina's supernatural origin, Mabel reshapes it - she now finds a balance between recognizing Faina's tangible existence and holding onto the possibility of something beyond explanation.

This moment demonstrates the spectrum of myth and reality that defines Mabel's journey to understanding and acceptance of Faina. Her newly acquired stance is reassured by a letter Mabel receives from her sister shortly after, at the end of which she states: „In my old age, I see that life itself is often more fantastic and terrible than the stories we believed as children, and that perhaps there is no harm in finding magic among the trees"[96] In the next chapter (34), this shift in her understanding becomes evident when Mabel shares the story of creating a girl from the snow with Esther, demonstrating that her belief in Faina's mystical nature persists, even though in a more conservative and balanced form.

Chapter 36 summarises about 4 years of Faina coming and going with the winter and the seemingly idyllic life that Jack and Mabel lead alongside their friends, the Bensons.[97] During these years, they worked in the fields, just like Mabel had imagined it in the past, and the farm was thriving. Their relationship was also good. When the winter arrived, Mabel made Faina new clothes, and she would bring them gifts from the mountains, such as a sack of dried fish or some pelts.[98] All seemed fine and balanced.

Garrett, the Bensons' son, spots an orange fox while out hunting one day. Despite Jack's urges not to shoot Faina's fox, he rebels, thinking it is a banal request made on behalf of a girl no one has ever seen, and shoots the fox. Immediately, he regrets his decision and feels ashamed. First, because he broke a promise he gave, and second because the pelt is worthless.[99] Having hidden the carcass under a few sticks, he heads home.

Given the fantastical nature of the novel, the reader is now wondering what impact could the killing of the fox make. The novel has already drawn from multiple motifs of the classical folktale's retellings and adaptations, which are all mentioned in the writing[100]: Faina comes and goes with the winter; she could be vulnerable to heat, as she seems to get unwell in the warm

[95] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 204
[96] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 205
[97] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 219-221
[98] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 221
[99] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 223
[100] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 109

cabin, suggesting a prolonged stay in such conditions may be fatal to her.[101] Secondly, when Faina feels threatened and misunderstood, or in other words, she feels unloved, she distances herself from the couple, suggesting that she could leave for good.[102]

While neither of those has reached a no-turning-back point yet, and given the couple's relationship with Faina kept stable for multiple years, it most likely wouldn't, meaning the two possible demises may have been successfully evaded. However, the death of the fox is definite and irreversible. On the other hand, Jack and Mabel have done all they could to protect the fox – should they still suffer the consequences?

M. S. Lwin examines the idea that in folktales, actions, whether good or bad, lead to corresponding reactions. This pattern found across cultures presents that even seemingly minor choices can shape a character's fate.[103] Lwin's analysis highlights the contrastive narrative structure commonly found in folktales, where moral and ethical dilemmas are presented in parallel.[104] In "The Snow Child", this structure is exemplified in the tension between protection and destruction of the fox – Jack and Mabel's will to protect it next to Gerrett's decision to kill it. This chapter alerts the reader's anticipation by introducing the irreversible act of killing Faina's fox, forcing them to question its potential consequences. Given the novel's folktale elements, where seemingly small actions can and often have corresponding consequences, the reader is left wondering whether this "betrayal" will damage Faina's connection to Jack and Mabel or signal a turning point in her fate.

Chapter 38 brings an unprecedented sighting of Faina by someone other than Mabel or Jack; it is Garrett, who accidentally crosses paths with her far in the mountains. He watches her kill and skin a swan, stashing its feathered wings away.[105] The next chapter (39) denotes an occasion when the Bensons arrive unexpectedly and witness Faina for the first time.[106] The reader may notice that while all these past years, Faina's existence has been hidden from everyone else, it is the abovementioned killing of the fox that marks the turning point in her "public" appearances. The reader is unlikely to disregard the sequence of events as coincidental, as the novel's structure has consistently employed the cause-and-effect nature of its narrative – Jack and Mabel's building of the snowman which seemingly caused Faina to appear in their

[101] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 179
[102] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 179
[103] Soe Marlar Lwin, "Revisiting a structural analysis of folktales: A means to an end?", The Buckingham Journal of Language and Linguistics (2009), 8-9, https://repository.nie.edu.sg/handle/10497/16167
[104] Lwin, "Revisiting a structural analysis of folktales: A means to an end?", 8
[105] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 230
[106] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 231

lives, the moments of doubt and pressure which caused Faina to withdraw, or the lack of their communication causing their mutual estrangement and misunderstanding.

The killing of the fox by Garrett appears to have disrupted the balance that kept Faina isolated and signals the upcoming unraveling of the tale, suggesting the novel adheres to its folktale traditions by presenting a cause-effect style in the narrative and hinting towards further development in Faina's fate.

The next chapters show Garrett and Faina's numerous encounters in the forest.[107] It is in chapters 43 and 44 that it becomes apparent the young adults have developed feelings towards each other, as they spend an abundance of time together,[108] incorporating the last of the folktale's recurring motifs: the Snow Maiden chooses mortal love. Soon enough, the old couple gets troubled by their behavior.[109] Immediately, a new danger to Faina arose, followed closely by her decision to stay around throughout the summer.[110] The sudden acceleration of the plot's unraveling alerts the reader, reinforcing the idea that the fox's death has set irreversible events into motion. It also signals that Faina is approaching the final test of her existence – the decision to stay through the summer. If she survives it, and her wedding that shall approach, it would rule out all previously suggested ways in which the myth could conclude, emphasizing the novel's unique approach to the folktale's structure.

Soon, Faina learns she is with a child. Mabel delves into thoughts of her life-long yearning for a child of her own, wondering if it was fate that placed Faina in her life, not as an "adoptive" daughter, but rather as a device of acquiring an actual baby, arguing to herself that Faina would not want or be able to take care of it.[111] Though dismissing such thoughts immediately,[112] this moment reveals the potential core of the story: Faina appears in the couple's lives with the purpose of fulfilling their longing for a child, but not in the way they had initially imagined. Rather than becoming their surrogate daughter, she becomes the means through which new life is brought into the world. This shifts the focus from the mere longing of the couple to a larger picture that incorporates the cycle of life, further noticing the novel's interweaving of temporariness and renewal into the narrative. Furthermore, it deepens the tension in Faina's fate, suggesting that she might not have, in fact, been meant to stay, as depicted in the traditional folktale adaptations.

[107] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 234, 239, 243, 247
[108] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 249, 255
[109] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 256
[110] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 257
[111] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 266
[112] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 267

To the news of Faina's pregnancy, Jack reacts as a father would if his 16-or-so-year-old daughter got pregnant and requires a wedding must take place. Mabel revisits the "Snegurochka" fairy tale book once again, feeling upset, as the book depicts its Snow Maiden's wedding, after which's solemnization, she melts down into a puddle of water.[113] This moment presents a heavy dilemma for both Mabel and the reader: all other possible demises have been tested and avoided, leaving the wedding as the final folktale's break point. However, rather than weakening the tension by the repetition of Faina's exposure to her potential demises, it strengthens the feeling of impending doom, which is reinforced by the alignment of the tangible fairy tale book and Faina's uncertain fate. The change in Faina's essence is also apparent and exposed to the reader: once running on snow without her feet sinking into the snow, she now walks in the mud signalizing the arrival of spring, with her feet ,,pressed so firmly to the ground that Mabel could see the soil squish between her toes."[114]

Using such detail, Ivey hints toward the transformation in Faina: she is no longer the untouchable, ethereal being she once appeared to be. Her correspondence with the natural world has shifted – once weightless, with an otherworldy feel, she becomes firmly grounded in the physical realm. Bearing a child and creating strong bonds with other characters, she becomes more human. As spring approaches, the season of renewal, but at the same time the season of inevitable endings (the snow melting away, the Snow Maiden and her wonder retreating until next winter), the novel depicts Faina's transformation from a fantastic notion into a mortal being bound by the cycle of life and death.

The narrative, however, does not abandon the fairy tale elements here. As the wedding is approaching, Mabel experiences nightmares about losing Faina. Despite it being summer already and Faina still alive and well, Mabel clings to the suggestion in the book that the wedding could be fatal. She refuses to weave a flower wreath for Faina's head for the wedding, as it is the only thing left of her at the end of Mabel's "Snegurochka" book.[115] On the wedding day, Faina wears a dress that she upgraded with the swan feathers she stashed away in winter as Garrett had glazed his eyes upon her for the first time.[116] This detail supports the fairy tale's influence on the narrative - how did Faina know all these months ago that she should preserve the feathers without any knowledge of her upcoming marriage? Her dress can symbolize the

[113] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 269
[114] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 273
[115] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 269
[116] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 230

connection to fate, a subtle suggestion that Faina's story has always followed the shape of a myth.

Faina gives birth precisely on the first day of snow.[117] The baby is delivered to the world the same way Faina once was – with the arrival of winter. However, the labor was complicated, and Faina seems tired and weak. She no longer walks on the snow with grace but struggles to take a step in the snow and stares into the forest, looking lost and empty.[118] Soon, she falls seriously ill, developing an overwhelming fever, and asks to be taken outside.[119] There, on an improvised bed, with Mabel having fallen asleep by her side, Faina mysteriously disappears, leaving behind only her child and clothes covered in a thick layer of snow. Confused and devastated, they look for Faina in the surrounding area, only to come to the understanding she is gone.[120]

Faina's departure feels both inevitable and mysterious, yet leaving space for discussion on its interpretation, as it omits a definite closure, one last time demonstrating the novel's commitment to the ambiguity of its storytelling.

In conclusion, this analysis highlights that the novel balances magic and reality by showcasing Faina as neither fully human nor fully magical but ultimately as a symbolic figure fulfilling Jack and Mabel's longing for a child of their own. Faina brought the couple back together by her recurring presence, serving as a transitional figure in their emotional journeys. The analysis examines the differing points of view, which change and evolve basically on a chapter-to-chapter basis because of Ivey's limited yet continuous dosage of new information. This shapes the narrative into a twist of realism and folktale. Both the characters and the reader interpret the events of the story in their own way based on their experiences. From the beginning, Faina's volatile, uncertain origin creates tension and affects the characters' opinions and decision-making, serving as a source of hope as well as a means of shaping the narrative.

Second, this section of the thesis explored the relationship between Ivey's "The Snow Child" and the original Russian tale of the Snow Maiden (Snegurochka). It explained that Ivey draws inspiration from various adaptations and authors and incorporates many of them in her own narrative.

[117] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 292
[118] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 294-295
[119] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 297
[120] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 301, 302

Grief and Healing

Next to the mythical nature of the novel is presented a second main theme: The grief Mabel and Jack endure over the loss of their baby and their inability to conceive. This chapter is tasked with following the couple's emotional journeys, coping processes, and moments of healing and examining if and how they are being shaped and affected by the juxtaposition of myth. This analysis draws from the context of the previous discussion on the novel's fairytaleness.

Zsolt Virágos tackles the function of myth in literature from an angle that distinguishes two main categories: First, myth can provide an added value to the narrative – to reinforce the structure of the text, add symbolic or rhetorical value, or draw parallels to highlight a sort of contrast. Virágos emphasizes that this first class of myth usage does not necessarily classify a text as a myth, but mostly functions as a supportive device.[121] The second category of myth usage in literature then includes and provides "larger dimensions" to the narrative, deepening its meaning and enlarging the possibilities of exploration of human experience.[122] He further argues the claim that myth is considered a „supreme interpretative device" since it offers a wide spectrum of possibilities and is deeply intertwined with human culture, therefore never growing old.[123]

In "The Snow Child", Ivey seemingly uses both of these functions. Drawing from the Russian folktale provides a mythical context that offers the parallel between the supernatural and reality. At the same time, the blending of the myth into her work achieves a broader dimension that explores human emotional journeys and directly references the myth as a catalyst of healing and transformation. Faina's existence not only serves as a thematic reference but also actively shapes the characters' experiences, perceptions, and choices. This interplay between the folktale's traditional function and the contemporary tendency to delve into underexplored topics exemplifies Virágos' claim that myth has a broad spectrum of possible uses.[124] The following analysis will explore how exactly the Snegurochka myth interwoven into Ivey's narrative affects its character's emotional paths.

Right at the beginning of the novel, it is presented why Mabel and Jack moved to Alaska: to get away from their "failure" to give birth and the constant reminders of it – sounds of other

[121] Virágos, "VERSIONS OF MYTH IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE," 56.

[122] Virágos, "VERSIONS OF MYTH IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE," 56,57.
[123] Virágos, "VERSIONS OF MYTH IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE," 57
[124] Virágos, "VERSIONS OF MYTH IN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE," 55

peoples' having families and their family members' rude comments.[125] It has been ten years since Mabel's miscarriage, and they never stopped grieving. On the first night the novel depicts, Mabel attempts to take her life by walking on the river's thin ice, which didn't break. Ivey depicts them over dinner and going to bed in a way that strongly suggests the couple's mutual estrangement and lack of communication.[126] In the next chapter, it is shown that Jack is grieving their child too, besides his regret of failing to provide a cozy home for his spouse.[127]

The current emotional states can be denoted as follows: Mabel grieves the loss of the child and what could've been, alongside the regret of not allowing herself to recover properly. Jack regrets not having the emotional capacity to comfort and provide for Mabel while questioning his manhood.[128] Additionally, when the Bensons visit them for the first time, Mabel is reluctant and would prefer not to meet with anyone, signaling her general enclosure.[129] It is revealed that a part of Mabel's turmoil is also caused by Jack directly – she imagined the idyllic life they would lead in Alaska, working in the fields together, etc. However, Jack clings to his role as a provider and would feel ashamed if Mabel would "have to work"; therefore, he doesn't "allow" her to work the fields with him, while it is something she desires.[130] This further establishes the reader's understanding of the couple's estrangement and misunderstanding.

When the first snow of the year arrived, their sights met while Jack was working outside. As the snow was falling, they gazed at each other, and Mabel sensed she was falling in love again – which, as Ivey depicts, hasn't happened in years,[131] marking the arrival of snow and the building of their snowman as the first instance of bringing the couple closer. This shift aligns with the appearance of Faina the same night, which, as previously discussed, is the first magical event of the novel, starting off both their journey toward healing and acceptance and their fantastical experience regarding Faina at the same time.

The happenings regarding the myth of Faina do not, however, always improve Jack and Mabel's relationship – but rather test it at times. This becomes evident when Mabel first asks Esther about the child. Instead of acknowledging his experience, Jack pulls back, leaving Mabel unsupported in the argument, which visibly frustrates her.[132] Jack, as the next chapter reveals, felt foolish to acknowledge what he had seen. His evasiveness deepens the divide between them

[125] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 13,30,31
[126] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 18
[127] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 20
[128] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 27, 25
[129] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 28
[130] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 37
[131] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 41
[132] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 72

- as he attempts to bait the child with food but refrains from telling Mabel, supposing it would upset her further. Upon Faina's collection of the gift that Jack left on the stump by the forest after failing with the food bait, she appears at their window. In the morning, they find a basket of blueberries at their doorstep. This provokes another discussion about the child. Mabel feels they must help her, while Jack believes she is self-sufficient. This deepens Mabel's frustration as she feels helpless, while Jack, convinced that Faina does not need their help, remains emotionally distant. Jack leaves the cottage despite being aware of Mabel's upcoming breakdown, which highlights his lack of emotional capacity and empathy.[133]

Thanks to the Snow Child's repeated visits around their homestead, her appearance, and her strange behavior, Mabel's belief in their magical creation of the child is strengthened. Suddenly, she seems pleased and collected, even though expressing thoughts of responsibility towards the child.[134] On the contrary, Jack's detachment continues to grow,[135] as he follows the girl through the forest in an attempt to catch up and talk with her. There, he witnesses her strange disappearance into the side of a mountain; what he fears the most is the possibility of losing his mind, as he finds himself chasing a little girl of unexplainable origin around the forest.[136] At this moment, he is not able to communicate his thoughts to Mabel.

The next time Faina appears, Jack's behavior shifts – rather than chasing after her, he ignores her and continues to chop the wood.[137] Afterward, she follows him around when he concludes his work, and he invites her inside for dinner. This suggests that the child seeks a connection with the couple, but it must happen on her terms. Jack and Mabel have to understand and respect her,[138] just like they must learn to understand and respect each other. This parallel between gradually gaining Faina's trust and the couple's healing process reflects how the myth's influence runs alongside their journey as a couple.

The following chapters (12,13) denote Jack's burial of Faina's father, an event that weighs heavily on him.[139] This experience makes him aware of his potential role as a father figure to Faina, as he now believes she is truly alone. At the same time, Mabel, influenced by her creationist approach to Faina's mysterious origin, senses responsibility towards her and also embraces the idea of their parentship potential to this child: ,,They were like children pretending

[133] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 76
[134] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 78
[135] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 81
[136] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 83
[137] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 84
[138] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 101
[139] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 98

to be mother and father, and Mabel was happy."[140] Their relationship also gains a fresh essence – once cold and reserved, Jack and Mabel now talk more openly and discuss their issues,[141] mirroring the slow but steady transformation that Faina brings to their lives.

Once again, a discussion about Faina with the Bensons leads to an argument – the Bensons, pragmatically insisting the girl can not exist, versus Mabel, still lacking Jack's support. However, this time, rather than retreating, Jack later expresses his admiration for Mabel's braveness and backing up her own standpoint (abilities he obviously lacks), which leads to yet another romantic encounter.[142] Once again, it is the myth that sets these events of healing and togetherness into motion, highlighting the myth's function of shaping the narrative.

Ivey, rather than depicting Jack and Mabel's emotional journeys as a linear path of improvement, keeps the storytelling dynamic – this applies not only to the interpretation of Faina's origin, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also how her story shapes their experiences and provokes self-reflection. Mabel, aware of the possible dangers to Faina, clings to the possibility of her demise, which forces her to relive the pain of her miscarriage. She revisits her grief and trauma and tackles it from a different perspective. Convinced her previous lack of faith and determination led to the miscarriage, she vows to never give up hope and do what she can to avoid losing Faina.[143] This is later exemplified by Mabel's numerous attempts to prevent Faina's seeming destiny or Mabel's following of Faina into a snowstorm in an attempt to "save" her from the element.[144]

The influence of Faina's presence on Mabel and Jack's relationship's prosperity is apparent when she retreats away at the end of the first winter. They scarcely interact with each other, and when they do, they argue.[145] Their going back to detachment, as Jack acknowledges, is caused by Faina's absence. Even on the days during winter when she didn't visit them, it was the anticipation of their next encounter that brought bliss into their lives. The feeling is now gone with the mysterious child.[146]

Then, Jack has a serious accident while working, rendering him bed-bound and unable to work the whole season.[147] Naturally, Mabel feels helpless and withdraws completely, ready to

[140] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 102
[141] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 113, 114
[142] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 118, 119
[143] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 130
[144] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 184
[145] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 135
[146] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 136
[147] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 141

give up and move back to their family in Pennsylvania.[148] However, the Bensons come to their rescue, convincing Mabel that together they will make the farm get by. During this interaction, Esther even manages to spark a source of strength in Mabel – as she references childbirth as an event that greatly hardens women, Mabel realizes, despite delivering a dead child, that she had also given birth, which visibly brings her spirit up.[149] The following months were filled with Mabel's self-discovery enticed by hard work in the fields. As she plants potatoes one day, she imagines as if she was creating little graves.[150] She recalls the night she had given birth and how she could not bring herself to bury the tiny body with Jack. As depicted on the following pages, Mabel never took the time to deal with their loss properly.[151] The lack of closure is now metaphorically represented by her "burying" of the potatoes, marking Mabel's progress in coping with her loss. She realizes that back then, she couldn't imagine living on, yet suddenly, she finds herself proud and vital, living out the life she once imagined. Despite facing her haunting past yet again, she acknowledges the turn in her feelings herself, telling Jack it was one of the best days of her life.[152]

During the months of Mabel working in the fields alongside Bensons, Jack, due to his broken back, is left in the cabin, slowly making progress toward healing. Laying in a dark room by himself, his consciousness blurred by strong medicine and moonshine for the pain, Jack's thoughts are limited to self-pity and desperation.[153] Even he, in the end, reaches a turnover. When he's capable, he cooks for the workforce, hinting he has finally accepted that he is not alone.[154] He seeks reassurance from Mabel, who, despite often lacking support from his side, soothes him.[155] As he sees he is allowed to open up a rely on Mabel, he finally recognizes their togetherness.[156] Then, his behavior in situations regarding Faina also shifts – when out on a walk with Garrett, the boy attempts to shoot Faina's orange fox as they cross paths with it. In contrast to his hesitation to admit her existence in the form of Bensons, he prohibits the shooting of the fox, stating it belongs to the girl, highlighting his transition from uncertainty to acceptance and emotional clarity.

[148] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 146
[149] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 148
[150] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 155
[151] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 156, 157
[152] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 160
[153] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 153
[154] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 157
[155] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 160
[156] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 161

The following chapters follow Faina's return in winter and the abovementioned[157] circumstances of Mabel's finding out about Jack's burial of her father and other pieces of evidence that point to Faina's humanity. As she is withdrawn from her belief in Faina's supernatural origin, Mabel and Jack's relationship experiences a strong transformation. Mabel is motivated by her previous vow to never let anything happen to her, leading her to follow the child into a snowstorm to save her.[158] When Jack finally finds Mabel freezing in the forest and helps her get warm, they have an unprecedented talk about their past tragedy.[159] Jack no longer distances from Mabel's expression of her feelings and joins in sharing his. Ultimately, they realize their foolishness and miscommunication. Faina's reappearance once again serves as a catalyst for progress in the couple's healing process. No longer avoiding emotions, they acknowledge their shared loss. In this way, Faina's presence tests them but ultimately strengthens their bond, allowing them to heal.

The couple's relationship with the child, however, takes a complicated turn. As Faina is reduced in Mabel's eyes to an orphan surviving alone in the forest, Mabel pushes an agenda on the child. She suggests she go to school, wash up, clean her clothes, etc. This causes the child to gradually retreat away from them. Given the interconnectedness of the myth and the couple's journey, the reader may notice the shortcomings of Mabel's behavior, which indicates that a portion of the couple's path toward acceptance and healing is still yet incomplete. Even to Jack, it is apparent that Mabel's actions do not come from overcontrolling or strictness but the undirected amount of love she feels toward the child.[160]

The author is quick to provide a patch to this issue. In the chapter depicting Faina showing Mabel her "home" in the wilderness, as previously discussed,[161] Mabel learns to understand Faina belongs to this world and puts her "selfish" urges to make Faina a part of the ordinary world aside. This allows her relationship with Faina to reach maturity and mutual respect.[162] Evolving from this, Mabel let go of her nosiness and rather cherished moments spent with their mysterious child. The following five years bring a balanced, healthy, idyllic life Mabel and Jack lead alongside their friends, the Bensons. Their mystical daughter comes and goes with the winter, during which they share many precious moments. In summer, they work in the fields together and anticipate Faina's arrival.[163]

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[157] Page 35
[158] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 184
[159] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 189-191
[160] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 193
[161] Page 27
[162] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 204
[163] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 219-221

As the mythical story unfolds, the couple nears their ultimate emotional challenge. When Faina and Garrett fall in love, the couple is deeply troubled. Basing their fears on the myth in their folktale book, which has so far aligned with Faina's story and depicts the child's demise as a result of mortal love, they view the child's relationship as a potential hazard to her existence.[164] Having learned from their previous mistakes of trying to control Faina, actions that always led to her withdrawal and strains on their relationship, Mabel and Jack choose, although hesitantly, to respect her decision to be with Garrett. When Faina learns she is expecting a child[165], they initiate her wedding with Garrett[166], and together with him, Jack starts building a house on their land for the young couple.[167] The strong bonds between the couple and Faina are truly explained when the wedding is approaching, signaling they have become a family, even though not bound by blood. Jack's realization of this bond is highlighted when Garrett comes to ask him for Faina's hand in marriage: „…fatherhood had arrived quietly, gradually… as he finally understood that a daughter had been flitting in and out of his life, now he was being asked to let her go."[168]. Mabel experiences a similar moment on the wedding day with Faina when she tells her: „I wish to be the mother you are to me…".[169] Just as she knew she should have with her deceased baby[170], Mabel now cuts off a piece of Faina's hair to preserve, hinting towards her awareness of figuratively losing another child.

Faina's following mysterious disappearance after her childbirth underscores the end of Mabel and Jack's path to mutual understanding and acceptance of their grief. Together, they know they will be able to overcome this loss and offer each other comfort rather than isolating apart,[171] which highlights the progress Faina has helped them to achieve. This also concludes the myth's function in this story as a device for exploring and shaping the narrative. It is only fair to acknowledge Garrett, Faina's husband, as well: he never gives up on Faina, relentlessly looking for her in the wilderness over days.[172] In the following years, he visits the mountains often, looking to reconnect with Faina's legacy.[173] Jack and Mabel help Garrett raise the child and, due to his frequent absence, serve as grandparents in the boy's life, creating a bond they always hoped for. Despite mourning the loss of Faina, they live on happily, together.

[164] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 256, 257
[165] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 266
[166] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 268
[167] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 275
[168] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 270
[169] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 284
[170] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 13
[171] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 302
[172] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 303
[173] Ivey, *The Snow Child*, 306

Conclusion

Through “The Snow Child”, Eowyn Ivey demonstrates the possibilities of reimagining traditional folktales in contemporary literature. First, this thesis explores the myth’s background and evolution from its earliest forms to modern days and highlights the key contributors to the genre like Afanasayev, Naaké, or Ransome. The research then discovers Ivey’s intertwining of the contrasting literary methods of folktale and (magic) realism. By blurring the boundaries between the genres, Ivey achieves an ambiguous narrative that can be interpreted in multiple ways regarding both the myth itself and the characters (and the readers’) individual perceptions and emotional journeys. This ambiguity is further reinforced by the author’s employment of narrative devices of differing points of view, elaborate intertextuality, or cause-effect style, which keeps the storytelling dynamic. The analysis shows that the folktale not only provides thematic richness to the narrative but serves as a catalyst for the characters’ transformation. The interplay between the fantastic and reality highlights how storytelling can function as a means of communicating serious and contemporary topics.

While adapting and reshaping the myth in various ways, Ivey stays faithful to the original essence of the tale, preserving its key structural elements and mysteriousness. The way Ivey crafts her narrative using uncertainty and ambiguity shows that folktale as a genre remains relevant and adaptable. By applying various theoretical frameworks like Berlina’s “Fantastic Polyvalence,” Lwin’s idea of “contrastive narrative structure,” or Van Gennep’s “The Rites of the Passage,” the analysis demonstrates the myth-based writing’s compatibility with elaborate literary theories and its ability to engage in modern literary discourse and resonate with modern readers. The novel format offers space for deeper exploration and evolution of its characters, rather than keeping the story simple and symbolic, allowing an insight into the complex topic of grief and healing.

Throughout “The Snow Child”, Ivey explores the themes of grief and healing through the evolving relationships between Jack, Mabel, and Faina. The novel draws a parallel between the myth of the Snow Maiden and the couple’s path to acceptance of their grief. The analysis shows that the two lines tend to mirror each other, highlighting the function of the myth in the novel as a device for shaping Jack and Mabel’s journey. Ivey portrays grief as not something to be conquered, but as a process shaping those who experience it. The couple’s final acceptance of Faina’s autonomy despite their fears and urges marks the completion of their path to emotional stability, illustrating that true healing comes not suddenly or easily, but through learning to love, trust, and myth.

This study contributes to a broader discussion on the role of mythology in contemporary literature by showing “The Snow Child” as an example of folktale-inspired writing that can serve as a powerful tool for complex exploration of various topics. Further research on this novel and its themes may regard how nature and setting play their own role in the narrative and how this role further shapes the characters’ experiences.

Resumé

Tato práce se věnuje románu “The Snow Child” (Dcera Sněhu, 2012) americké spisovatelky Eowyn Ivey a jeho specifickému využití mytologických prvků v moderní literatuře. Autorka se inspirovala ruským folklorním příběhem “Snegurochka” (Sněhurka), který zasadila do realistického prostředí aljjašské divočiny. Práce zkoumá, jakým způsobem Ivey propojuje prvky folklóru a magického realismu k dosažení příběhu, který je otevřený k mnoha různým interpretacím díky vrstvení různorodých úhlů pohledu a dalsších literárních způsobů. Dále se zaměřuje na využití pohádky o Sněhurce k vykreslení dalšího hlavního tématu tohoto románu, jímž je zármutek a cesta k jeho rozuzlení.

První kapitola popisuje teoretický rámec tohto díla, přičemž jej zasazuje do kontextu literárního umění a jeho návaznost na literární žánry (magický) realismus a folklór. Jako realistický ho rozlišuje díky častému detailnímu popisu postav a situací a reálnému dějišti. Naproti tomu se v díle objevují nevysvětelné, magické prvky, které kontrastují s realistickým přístupem a tím pozicují tento román na pomezí hned několika žánrů. Dále se kapitola věnuje vysvětlení nejdůležitějších literárních pojmů, které usnadňuje čtenářovu orientaci v této práci a její porozumění. Mezi tyto hlavní vysvětlivky se řadí již výše zmíněné žánry, ale také například pojmy mnohoznačnost, narativní styl a “mezitextovost”, který odkazuje na vztah Iveyina díla k dalším adaptacím této pohádky a autorům. Dále tato sekce popisuje vztah termínů mýtus, mytologie a folklór k tomuto dílu a dále ho zasazuje do postmodernictického dobového kontextu.

Analytická část této práce se dělí na dvě kapitoly – první zkoumá, jak autorka převypráví klasický příběh o Sněhurce pomocí kombinace žánrů a přináší tak efekt mnohoznačnosti, jímž dosahuje vrstvení možných interpretací díla. Na tuto kapitolu navazuje sekce zavývající se emociálními proměnami hlavích postav Jacka a Mabel, kteří čelí zármutku v podobě ztráty novorozeného dítěte. Tato sekce zkoumá, jakým způsobem zakomponování mýtu do narativu ovlivňuje a utváří cestu této dvojice od vzájemného odcizení způsobené ztrátou dítěte k uchopení jejich zármutku a vyrovnání se se ztrátou, přičemž zároveň nacházejí i cestu zpět k sobě.

První analytická kapitola se zaměřuje na způsob, jakým Ivey převypráví tradiční příběh v románové formě. Rozáhlost románu umožňuje nejen evoluci postav, ale také komplexnější narativní výstavbu. Autorka se inspiruje různými adaptacemi, včetně verzí od Arthura Ransoma, Freyi Littledaleové, nebo původního folklórního příběhu zaznamenaného

Afanasyevem, přičemž kombinuje vybrané prvky z každého z nich a vytváří tak dynamické propojení mezi tradicí a moderní interpretací. Dále kapitola zkoumá, jak Ivey využívá kombinaci realismu a magického realismu k rozostření hranic mezi těmito žánry, čímž aktivně zapojuje čtenářovu pozornost, stejně jako evokuje tendenci svých postav měnit úhly pohledu na dané situace a tím podporuje mnohoznačnost příběhu. Touto mnohoznačností se zabývá také koncept „fantastické polyvalence“ od Alexandry Berliny. Berlina se zaměřuje na mnohoznačnost v románu “Dcera Sněhu” a jeho schopnost přecházet mezi různými významovými rovinami, čímž podporuje myšlenku širokých možností interpretace díla. Dále je analyzována teorie Arnolda Van Gennepa o “rituálech přechodu” (rites of passage), kde Van Gennep popisuje proměny postav v literatuře a analyzuje symboliku jejich fyzického i psychického strádání. Ivyein román demonstruje jeho koncept vykreslením některých pasáží jakožto “rituály přechodu” tím, že kombinuje drastickou emociální proměnu Mabel uprostřed sněhové bouře. Tyto teoretické rámce poskytují hlubší porozumění tomu, jak román využívá magické prvky k vykreslení procesu změny a její přijetí. Hlavní částí kapitoly je poté samotná analýza klíčových pasáží knihy, ve kterých se objevují magické a nevšední prvky. Tato analýza za použití ustanovených teorií hodnotí a porovnává, jaké důsledky mají fantastické prvky na interpretaci daných událostí, zejména na původ a důvod přítomnosti Sněhurky v jinak realistickém prostředí. Tento rozbor přispívá k debatě o prolínáni různorodých žánru a odhaluje, že tato metoda nabízí širokou škálu možností k vyprávění příběhu.

Kapitola Zármutek a vyléčení poté aplikuje tezi Zsolta Virágose, který popisuje funkci mýtu v literatuře a rozděluje ji na dvě části – jakožto strukturální a symbolický prvek na jedné straně a na straně druhé jako hlubší interpretační nástroj, který rozšiřuje možnosti zkoumání komplexních témat. V tomto případě novela pomocí mýtu ilustruje široké možnosti zkoumání lidských zkušeností a emoční transformace. Ivey využívá obou těchto funkcí mýtu: ruský folklorní motiv poskytuje tématickou a estetickou hloubku díla, zatímco zakomponování mýtu do narativu slouží jako prostředek k utváření samotného vývoje – osud Fainy, tajemného dítěte s nejasným původem, se úzce prolíná s cestou Jacka a Mabel ke znovunalezení lásky a sebedůvěry. Samotná analýza se tentokrát již nevěnuje tolik pohádkovým a zvláštním momentům které ovlivňují průběh a možnosti interpretace děje. Věnuje se zkoumání pasaží z knihy, ve kterých dochází k utváření cesty této dvojice hlavních postav od jejich emočního odloučení a individuálního truchlení, až po konečné rozuzlení v podobě znovunabytí sounáležitosti a emoční vyrovnání se s jejich ztrátou. Analýza v této kapitole potvrzuje tendenci, kdy události okolo interakcí dvojice s dítětem přímo ovlivňují jejich psychický vývoj a vzájemnou dynamiku. Faina zde nefunguje pouze jako pasivní symbol nevinnosti či nostalgie

po ztraceném dítěti, ale stává se aktivním činitelem, který Jacka a Mabel vede k postupné změně vnímání jejich vlastní bolesti. Skrze vztah k ní se učí přijímat realitu svého zármutku, nikoli jej nadále popírat nebo před ním unikat. Kapitola zároveň zkoumá, jakým způsobem Ivey využívá kontrast mezi magickým a realistickým prvkem ke zdůraznění emocionálních proměn postav. Zatímco v počátečních fázích příběhu se interpretace původu Fainy stává komplikovanou záležitostí měnící se kapitolu od kapitoly, později je vnímána téměř výhradně skrze optiku mystiky a pohádkovosti, a na konci děje se její role proměňuje - stále více se propojuje s realitou a tím i s osobním růstem Jacka a Mabel. Tento posun naznačuje, že proces uzdravování neprobíhá náhle či skrze zázračné vyléčení, ale je výsledkem postupného přijetí bolesti a naučení se znovu důvěřovat a milovat.

Závěrem lze konstatovat, že román "The Snow Child" od Eowyn Ivey představuje komplexní literární dílo, které využívá mytologické prvky nejen jako tematický rámec, ale i jako nástroj k prohloubení emoční roviny jeho vyprávění. Ivey propojuje magické prvky s realistickým prostředím, čímž vytváří mnohoznačný narativ, který umožnuje širokou škálu interpretací. Výsledky této práce ukazují, že "Dceru Sněhu" lze vnímat jako dílo, které nejen kreativně adaptuje tradiční mýtus, ale zároveň přináší hlubokou introspekci lidského prožívání ztráty a naděje. Ivey tak nejen zachovává podstatu původní pohádky, ale také ji rozvíjí způsobem, který oslovuje současného čtenáře a přispívá k širší diskuzi o funkci folklóru v moderní literatuře.

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