

NAPPAALUK, Mitiarjuk, 2014 *Sanaaq*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 248 pages.

Norma Dunning

Volume 38, numéro 1-2, 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1028864ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1028864ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit Inc.  
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

Citer ce compte rendu

Dunning, N. (2014). Compte rendu de [NAPPAALUK, Mitiarjuk, 2014 *Sanaaq*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 248 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 38(1-2), 269–272. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1028864ar>

has been successful in bringing forth Inuvialuit perspectives on their cultural heritage and identity.

*Where the Wind Blows Us* is an important contribution to discussions on the purpose and relevance of archaeological research, especially in instances where there are clear links between physical objects surviving from the past and local communities. Although the author's main purpose in writing the book was to highlight the role of Inuvialuit in research processes and in generating knowledge about their own past, the book also offers the reader information about Inuvialuit cultural heritage that is interesting and informative in itself. Framing the Inuvialuit role and achievements in terms of critical theory will likely make this a difficult read for people who do not participate in the culture of academia; however, it is important for the messages that are contained in the book to be communicated to new generations of university-trained scholars. No doubt the book will also provide researchers who are more advanced in their careers with much to reflect upon as they consider the relevance of their own work.

Charles D. Arnold  
Arctic Institute of North America  
University of Calgary  
mailing address: 6160 Aldergrove Drive  
Courtenay, British Columbia V9J 1V7, Canada  
arnold.charles199@gmail.com

NAPPAALUK, Mitiarjuk

2014 *Sanaaq*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 248 pages.

Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk has gifted Canada and the Inuit world, of both past and present, with her beautiful story, her novel *Sanaaq*. She has allowed each of us a small look into the once everyday existence of the Inuit from her home territory in northern Quebec. The world is a better place for it.

*Sanaaq* was released in English on New Year's Day of 2014. In a prior book review, Martin (2014) mentioned that *Sanaaq* represents a non-traditional novel. Indeed, the novel is historically thought of in terms of structure and subject matter, but *Sanaaq* veers from the literary constraints of how a novel is produced. This novel was written over a 20-year timeframe and took another 20 years to be birthed into the English domain. Some will say it is an ethnographic study of the everyday life of the Inuit shortly before the arrival of the Qallunaat, as missionaries, businessmen, and medical staff. But what has to be remembered, as stressed by Trott (2014), is that *Sanaaq* is a novel that was originally completed in Inuktitut in 1974 and first published in syllabics in 1984, with a premier translation into French in 2002.<sup>1</sup> It thus took 40

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Saladin d'Anglure did the translation from Inuktitut to French.

years to be released to an English audience.<sup>2</sup> It is most regrettable that Nappaaluk is no longer with us and unable to enjoy her story's entrance among the English public. Without the author here to help us sort out her novel, it is left to the readers to do just that for themselves.

Nappaaluk introduces the main character of the story, Sanaaq, as a woman characterized by a practical approach toward life from the opening scene onward. Readers are invited into her life as she prepares herself to head out, on her own, to gather mat-making material, taking with her a couple of dogs and enough food to last her through her day. The opening sentence reveals to the reader that the Qallunaat, the white men, have a presence in Sanaaq's life already as she gathers up "matches and chewing tobacco" (p. 3) as a part of her provisions for this full day of work. As Sanaaq is returning, she stoops to pick berries for her little girl, who yells, "It's Mother! It's Mother!" (p. 5) upon seeing her returning home. There is a narrative within the first third of this book that brings to mind those readers that lined the desks of our elementary school years, the "Dick and Jane" genre of how we all learned to read; however the subject matter within *Sanaaq* is much different.

We are brought into a world of making your own: everything from the meals prepared from the game shot out on the land to the clothes on your back and to the stories told and handed down from generation to generation. Ningiukuluk tells us, "I can no longer do anything because I am an old woman," (p. 67) and recounts a story of wisdom, passed on to her from years before. It is the story of a lone Inuk who is frightened within his snow house. He is later given the dead bodies of a caribou and a wolf, lying side by side, which had been killed by the she-wolf who had frightened him from his shelter. Ningiukuluk says, "We get by thanks to gifts" (p. 69) to remind the world of the importance of sharing and remaining fearless of the unknown. Nappaaluk disperses her Indigenous knowledge throughout the book, like small teasers peppered here and there, enriching the text with elderly insight.

The influence of the Qallunaat is seen again when Ningiukuluk tells Sanaaq of a bad dream she had had, one in which something is broken, and she cautions Sanaaq to take care of her baby son or else someone close to her will die (p. 86). Sanaaq chides the old woman, telling her, "We've been told not to believe at all in such things. They're not really things to believe in *ai!*" From that moment onward, bad luck falls upon the encampment, and it is not until Nappaaluk writes down the importance of an elder's wisdom that the situation begins to improve, "Without elders the Inuit are nothing, for this is much knowledge that the elders alone possess!" (p. 112). Nappaaluk brings back how to view the world with Inuit eyes over and over again, perhaps writing in her own way to the generations that have not yet come into this world but who are waiting to. The book falls out of the "Dick and Jane" genre completely.

There is a change in voice as this book progresses and it would be feasible to assume that as the author matures her writing style becomes more conformed to the standards of the English language. The beating of Sanaaq by her husband Qalingu (p.

---

<sup>2</sup> Peter Frost did the translation from French to English.

164) brings about the deepest sadness within this text. The violence laid upon Sanaaq changes the tone of the story, as does the physical landscape the book is based upon. Tuberculosis enters the community, and Qalingu “goes out” to work and support his family, paper money begins to be recognized as having value, and living inside stagnant wooden walls becomes the norm; it seems as though all of Inuit traditional life is falling apart. There is a rapidity to the assimilation laid upon this band of characters, and acceleration to the conformity of Qallunaat ways becomes paramount. It is this portion of the text that is hardest to digest.

Nappaaluk gives us her wisdom once more by introducing the succubus of Maatiusi, who had had Arnatuinnaq promised to him in marriage, as a young child, a common tradition of the Inuit. Maatiusi is stricken by the *nuliarsaq* and is unable to maintain a normal life. When Qalingu encourages him to speak of this dream woman who has been haunting his daily life, she disappears.

Nappaaluk, in her own way, may be asking the Inuit as a community to speak about their own lives and the way the change brought about by outsiders has affected them while remaining true to the Inuit traditional ways of knowing and being. This may be the message at the root of this novel. It is not up for debate whether or not an Inuk woman has written what non-Inuit may call a novel; it is not up for debate whether or not Inuit knowledge has vanished. This is a book filled with tradition, the tradition that still lies within the blood of every Inuk in Canada. It is a book about the strength, courage, and love of family by one Inuk woman and how each of these traits were passed on to her own community, uninterrupted and with tenderness, allowing other Inuit to follow along the path Sanaaq has broken for us all.

## References

MARTIN, Keavy

2014 Southern readers finally get a chance to read Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk, the accidental novelist, *Globe and Mail*, January 14 (online at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/book-reviews/southern-readers-finally-get-a-chance-to-read-mitjarjuk-nappaaluk-the-accidental-inuit-novelist/article16389857/>).

TROTT, Christopher

2014 *Sanaaq: First novel in Inuktitut, now in English*, Christopher Trott interviewed by Sonali Karnick, All in a Weekend, *CBC*, January 18 (online at: <http://www.cbc.ca/allinaweekend/books/2014/01/18/sanaaq-first-inuit-novel-now-in-english/>).

Norma Dunning  
Indigenous Peoples Education  
University of Alberta  
mailing address: 10442 – 82 St.

Edmonton, Alberta T6L 3M7, Canada  
dunning1@ualberta.ca

NATCHER, David C., Lawrence FELT et Andrea PROCTER (dir.)  
2012 *Settlement, Subsistence, and Change Among the Labrador Inuit: The Nunatsiavummiut Experience*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press.

Ce recueil comprend dix études de données archéologiques, historiques et contemporaines ayant trait à l'utilisation des terres et des ressources ainsi qu'au mode de gouvernance des Inuit du Labrador. En janvier 2005, ceux-ci signaient une entente avec les gouvernements fédéral et provincial au sujet du règlement de leurs revendications territoriales globales. Vers la fin de cette même année, ils célébraient leur autonomie gouvernementale dès lors acquise ainsi que l'exercice d'une certaine souveraineté sur l'ensemble du Nunatsiavut. Cet accord historique définit les limites de ce territoire, les critères d'éligibilité aux bénéfices qui en découlent, le mode de gouvernance et les droits de propriété. Les auteurs proposent d'explorer comment les limites et perspectives découlant de cette nouvelle situation se traduisent dans des politiques régionales qui tiennent compte de l'histoire complexe de la région, des schémas de peuplement (implantation, nomadisme, migrations) et de la mouvance identitaire inuit. Les auteurs interpellent le mode de vie et les traditions culturelles des Inuit en analysant des aspects aussi divers que les modes de subsistance et de peuplement depuis la préhistoire des Thuléens jusqu'à nos jours, la composition des ménages et l'économie sociale de la production alimentaire, les relocalisations et les revendications territoriales ainsi que les formes d'adaptation émergentes face au réchauffement climatique, à l'urbanisation, à la mondialisation de l'économie et à l'autonomie gouvernementale. Il s'agit d'un ouvrage interdisciplinaire dont les auteurs sont des universitaires ou proviennent des communautés, et certains chapitres résultent d'une collaboration entre ces deux groupes.

Dans l'introduction, les auteurs reviennent sur les négociations territoriales qui ont porté fruit au terme de luttes échelonnées sur près de trois décennies. Ils font référence aux ayants droit, au territoire ainsi qu'aux communautés du Labrador. Les auteurs se penchent également sur les effets attendus suite à la mise en place d'un gouvernement basé sur l'ethnicité tout en annonçant très brièvement certains constats présentés plus en détail dans les 10 chapitres suivants. Ils affirment que les stratégies mises en place par le gouvernement du Nunatsiavut sont basées sur une intégration rationnelle de connaissances scientifiques et de savoirs traditionnels. Effectivement, certains chapitres (p. ex., 6 et 7), qui traitent de récolte autochtone (chasse, pêche et cueillette), sont construits sur ce principe dit «ethnoécologique». Un mode de gestion des terres et des ressources basé sur l'ethnoécologie et sur les résultats d'études du type présenté dans ce volume permettrait-il d'atteindre l'équilibre recherché dans le développement régional et durable malgré la mondialisation de l'économie?

Les trois premiers chapitres traitent principalement de la préhistoire récente (Néo-esquimau) et de l'histoire des Inuit. Susan Kaplan (chapitre 1), qui travaille sur ces questions depuis plus de trois décennies, fait remonter à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre