

EVANS, Michael Robert, 2010 *The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 162 pages.

Emily E. Auger

Volume 34, Number 2, 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1004109ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1004109ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.

Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (print)

1708-5268 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Auger, E. E. (2010). Review of [EVANS, Michael Robert, 2010 *The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 162 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 34(2), 189–190.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1004109ar>

130 St. George  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3H1, Canada  
ajohns@chass.utoronto.ca

EVANS, Michael Robert  
2010     *The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat*, Lincoln and London,  
University of Nebraska Press, 162 pages.

*The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat* is the first in a series of books titled *Indigenous Films* edited by Randolph Lewis and David Delgado Shorter and published by the University of Nebraska Press. The series addresses other films by or about Native peoples, including *Dances with Wolves*, *Black Robe*, *Pocahantas*, and more. The goal is to support classroom instruction and, more broadly, “to challenge the Eurocentrism that often afflicts the study of cinema, and to initiate conversations about the promises and challenges of indigenous media now emerging around the globe” (p. xi). *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (released in 2002) was chosen as the subject of the first book in the series not only because of its box office success, but also because it has inspired so many reviews and commentaries by authors, scholars, and film critics.

*Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* is the first feature film of its kind and the first to be entirely in Inuktitut. It is also the first of a trilogy of Canadian films produced by Isuma Igloolik Productions. *Atanarjuat*, directed by Zacharias Kunuk, is based on an Inuit legend that is still retold in the Arctic. The film is set in the Igloolik region of 500 years ago, and jealousy is the motive leading to the high point: a man’s escape from a murderous gang by running alone, naked, and without provisions across the ice. The second film in the trilogy, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006), also directed by Kunuk, is based on the writings of Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen who visited the Igloolik area with Therkel Mathiassen and Peter Freuchen in 1922. The third film, *Before Tomorrow* (2009), is based on the novel *Før Morgendagen* by Danish author Jørn Riel. Set in 1840, it is about a boy and his grandmother who find the others in their camp dead of disease brought by white men<sup>1</sup>.

Michael Robert Evans, who also wrote a chapter on *The Fast Runner* for his book *Isuma: Inuit Video Art* (2008), tells us much about the film, and readers are likely to wish that he had covered the complete trilogy. *The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat* includes such useful materials as a chart showing the film’s characters and family relationships, a pronunciation guide, two maps, a gallery of nine black-and-white photographs, a bibliography, and an index. Chapter One is a short historical background, including the introduction of video into this region and its use as an art form. Chapter Eight describes the founding of Nunavut in order to set the historical context for the development of video as an art form in the north. There is also a comparison with similar developments in video production in Australia. Chapters Three and Four further describe Igloolik Isuma Productions and the lives of its

---

<sup>1</sup> All three films are available at <http://www.isuma.tv/fastrunnertrilogy>.

founding members: Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn, Paulousie Qulitalik, Paul Apak Angilirq (d. 1998), and others. It was Paul Apak Angilirq who first thought of filming the Atanarjuat legend. Chapter Four specifically explains the funding process for the film, and identifies the goals and priorities of Isuma, including the importance of using Inuktitut and representing Inuit values. Chapter Five provides synopses of several versions of the legend, including one of the film script. Chapters Two and Seven discuss the representation of certain themes in the film, including shamanism, games, marriage, laws and leadership, architecture, resources, clothing, and nomadic life. Chapter Six summarises published reviews and discussions of the film.

The book might have benefited from some minor reorganisation of the material, but it is well written and the information clear and easy to follow. Students should make their own close reading notes from the film, as the synopsis in Chapter Five evidently follows the script, not the final production. Despite efforts to present both positive and negative reviews, Chapter Six gives the distinct impression that only those who praise the film understand it. While this impression might have been mitigated by some attention to the values and goals of the venues that featured these reviews and commentaries, it does not lessen the value of the book, but rather points to avenues of discussion beyond those already discovered and traversed by the author.

Emily E. Auger  
Independent scholar  
Canada  
augere@canada.com

KAFAROWSKI, Joanna (ed.)  
2009 *Gender, Culture and Northern Fisheries*, Edmonton, CCI Press, 242 pages.

This edited volume explores the roles of northern women in both subsistence and commercial fisheries in Alaska, Canada, Iceland, Norway, and Finland. The roles of men and women in fishing vary across the north, yet men are primarily construed as the actual fish harvesters in governance policies and research. This gap in perception and research may undermine efforts to develop sustainable fisheries that allow for both commercial and subsistence activities.

The book is divided into two sections, “Gendered Participation in Subsistence and Commercial Activities,” and “Governance Practices.” However, some of the ideas of each can be found in the other. For instance, in many of the 12 studies in the book, women are engaged in “supporting” work for the subsistence and commercial fisheries. This work is vital to the economic cycle (such as processing and distributing or selling the fish), but it is also defined here to include creating and maintaining social and policy structures at local and regional levels that support fishing. Katherine Reedy-Maschner’s chapter on Aleut fishing, for example, explores the many roles of women in the community and the commercial fishing industry. These include as fishers,