

John Walker's Passage (Canadian Cinema)

Darrell Varga



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John Walker is one of Canada's most prolific and important documentary filmmakers and is known for his many thoughtful, personally inflected films. His masterwork, *Passage*, centres on Sir John Franklin's failed expedition to find the final link of the Northwest Passage connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Canadian Arctic. It also gives us the story of John Rae, the Scottish explorer who discovered the fate of Franklin and the final link in the passage, but was left to the margins of history. Walker's film brings to this story a layering of dramatic action and behind-the-scenes documentary footage that build tension between the story of the past and interpretations of the present.

Darrell Varga provides a close analysis of *Passage*, situating it within Walker's rich body of work and the Canadian documentary tradition. Varga illuminates how the film can be viewed through the lens of Harold Innis's theories of communication and culture, opening up the work of this great Canadian political economist to film studies.

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