

*Acclaim for Barry Lopez's*

## ARCTIC DREAMS

"A master nature writer.... Mr. Lopez brought his talent for close observation, empathy, freshness and wonder to a major effort north of treeline. . . . The gift of sight (and second sight) focused here upon the ocean, ice, skylscapes, landscapes and wildlife is extraordinary."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"One of those landmark works of travel writing like, say, Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*." —*The New Yorker*

"A splendid book, passionate and compassionate, by a man who is both a first-rate writer and an uncompromising defender of the wild country and its native inhabitants."

—Edward Abbey

"A marvelous evocation of the Arctic by a naturalist, who is part poet.... A magical book to read slowly and savor."

—*Irish Times*

"Dazzling.... Treats the distant, snowy world of the Arctic as a place that exists not only in the mathematics of geography but also in the terra incognita of our imaginations."

—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"A monumental work, not only in its revelation of the author's depth of vision but, in a very real sense, it is a monument to the uniqueness, the mystery, and the drama of the Arctic wilderness."  
—*Living World*

"A powerful storyteller.... Here is a book full of resonance."  
—Margaret Atwood

"One of the finest books ever written about the far North."  
—*Publishers Weekly*



*Barry Lopez*

## ARCTIC DREAMS

Barry Lopez is the author of six works of nonfiction and eight works of fiction. His writing appears regularly in *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, *DoubleTake*, and *The Georgia Review*. He is the recipient of a National Book Award, an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and other honors. He lives in western Oregon.

BOOKS BY BARRY LOPEZ

NONFICTION

*Arctic Dreams*  
*Of Wolves and Men*

FICTION

*Light Action in the Caribbean*  
*Lessons from the Wolverine*

*Field Notes*  
*Crow and Weasel*

*Winter Count*  
*River Notes*

*Giving Birth to Thunder, Sleeping with His Daughter*  
*Desert Notes*

ESSAYS

*Apologia*  
*About This Life*  
*The Rediscovery of North America*  
*Crossing Open Ground*

*Barry Lopez*

ARCTIC  
DREAMS

*Imagination and Desire  
in a Northern Landscape*



VINTAGE BOOKS

*A Division of Random House, Inc.*

*New York*

FIRST VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, OCTOBER 2001

*Copyright © 1986 by Barry Holstun Lopez.*

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States of America by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto. Originally published in hardcover by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, in 1986.

Published by arrangement with Scribner, an imprint of  
Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Vintage and colophon are registered trademarks of Random House, Inc.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to quote from "The Field of the Caribou," copyright © 1966 by John Haines, reprinted from *Winter News* by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lopez, Barry Holstun, 1945-

Arctic dreams : imagination and desire in a northern landscape / [Barry Lopez].

p. cm.

Originally published: New York : Scribner, 1986.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 0-375-72748-5

1. Natural history—Arctic regions. 2. Arctic regions—Description and travel.

3. Arctic regions—Discovery and exploration. I. Title.

QH84.1 .L67 2001

508.98—dc21

2001026078

*Maps by David Lindroth*

*Author photograph © Nancy Crampton*

www.vintagebooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

*For  
Sandra*

The landscape conveys an impression of absolute permanence. It is not hostile. It is simply there—untouched, silent and complete. It is very lonely, yet the absence of all human traces gives you the feeling you understand this land and can take your place in it.

EDMUND CARPENTER

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience; to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder upon it, to dwell upon it.

He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it.

He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of the moon and the colors of the dawn and dusk.

N. SCOTT MOMADAY

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiii
AUTHOR'S NOTE	xvii
PREFACE	xix
Prologue: Pond's Bay, Baffin Island	i
1. Arktikós	15
2. Banks Island: <i>Ovibos moschatus</i>	42
3. Tórnnârssuk: <i>Ursus maritimus</i>	76
4. Lancaster Sound: <i>Monodon monoceros</i>	119
5. Migration: The Corridors of Breath	152
6. Ice and Light	204
7. The Country of the Mind	252
8. The Intent of Monks	302
9. A Northern Passage	355
Epilogue: Saint Lawrence Island, Bering Sea	407
NOTES	417
MAPS	421
APPENDICES	427
BIBLIOGRAPHY	445
INDEX	449

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MY DEBTS are great. And my sense of gratitude, especially to those with whom I traveled in the Arctic, is very deep. First to Lloyd Lowry, Bob Nelson, and Kathy Frost, knowledgeable and sterling companions, whom I accompanied on coastal surveys in the Beaufort, Chukchi, and Bering seas. To Bob Stephenson, with whom I traveled extensively in Alaska: in the Brooks Range, in Nelchina Basin, on the upper Yukon, and to Saint Lawrence Island. To Kerry Finley, for his companionship and assistance in northern Baffin Island. To Don Ljungblad, who introduced me to the spring ice in Bering Sea and to bowhead whales. To Ray Schweinsburg, who introduced me to polar bears in the Canadian Archipelago. To Rick Will, Becky Cole, Shirleen Smith, and Bill Abercrombie, my companions on Banks Island; and Bruce Dinneford, my companion at Pingok Island.

I am indebted as well to the officers and men of the MV *Soodoc*, especially Master Pitt Schroter, Ice Master Niels Jorgensen, third mate Jean-Luc Bédard, and second engineer Andre Gill, for their accommodation and patience with my questions. I also wish to thank the officers and crew of the NOAA ship *Oceanographer* and the men working on the Panarctic Oils drill rigs "Cape Mamen" and "Whitefish," and at the Panarctic base camp at Rae Point, Melville Island, for their assistance and cordiality.

Several institutions provided extensive logistical support during periods of field research—the Alaska Department of Fish and

Game in the United States and, in Canada, Polar Continental Shelf Project, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources Canada; Wildlife Management Division, Department of Renewable Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories; and Atmospheric Environment Service, Department of Environment Canada. I would also like to thank the public relations staffs at Panarctic Oils, Sohio Alaska Petroleum Company, and Cominco for their help.

Without the support of Colin Crosbie of Crosbie Shipping I would not have been able to retrace the sea route of John Davis and William Parry. Without the assistance of George Hobson, Director of Polar Continental Shelf, and the willingness of pilot Duncan Grant to seemingly always make room, I could not have traveled as extensively as I was able to in the Canadian Archipelago. I thank each of them sincerely.

Many scientists gave unstintingly of their time in lengthy interviews. I would especially like to thank, in addition to those already mentioned, Anne Gunn, Kent Jingfors, Thor Larsen, Dennis Andriashek, John Burns, Mitch Taylor, Martha Robus, Cliff Hickey, Peter Schledermann, and Bob Janes. Christian Vibe, Frank Miller, Murray Newman, Rick Davis, James Helmer, Diane Lyons, Harriet Critchley, Poul Henrichsen, Greg Galik, Sam Luciani, and Guy Palmer also provided critical interviews.

I feel inadequate in trying to convey my sense of appreciation to the people of various native villages, for their deference and understanding in the face of my intrusion. Among those who were generous with their time I especially wish to pay my respects to George Noongwook, Vernon Slwooko, Alex Akeya, Bob Ahgook, Oolaiuk Nakitavak, and David Kalluk for invaluable interviews and experiences. Qujannamiik.

Often during my travels I was in need of a meal and a place to sleep. I would like to offer private words of gratitude to all who opened their homes to me.

Peter Schledermann generously provided library privileges and working space at the Arctic Institute of North America in

Calgary; Colleen Cabot provided a place to work at the Teton Science School, Kelly, Wyoming, during a critical period. Martin Antonetti and Kerry Finley helped with Latin and Inuktitut translation, respectively. Many individuals graciously answered requests for documents. I would especially like to acknowledge Arthur Credland of Kingston Upon Hull's Town Docks Museum for records of the whaling ship *Cumbrian*-, Steve Amstrup, Malcolm Ramsay, and Gordon Stenhouse for material on polar bears; David Gray for material on muskoxen; Jim Levison for information about loons; Bud Fay for material on walrus; Anthony Higgins for data on Oodaaq Island; and Marty Grossman for information on Edward Israel.

I would like to express my personal and professional gratitude to Lewis Lapham at *Harper's*, Robley Wilson at *North American Review*, John Rasmus at *Outside*, and Paul Perry at *Running* for their support while I was at work on the manuscript.

Several people with whom I spoke only briefly were nevertheless instrumental in helping me clarify my ideas and intentions. I would like to express my appreciation for that reason to Ted Muraro, Maurice Haycock, JOrn Thomassen, Martin Luce, and Keith Quinlan.

Some of the ideas in this book grew out of conversations with friends little concerned, directly, with the Arctic. It is difficult to be precise about such debts, but they are no less real than those to a traveling companion. I would like to thank in this capacity Dick Showalter, Tony Beasley, and China Galland.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Isabel Stirling, who helped me greatly as a research assistant and typist.

Finally, I wish to thank my editor, Laurie Schieffelin, and my agent, Peter Schults, for their faith during a long period of work and for their discerning reading of the manuscript at various stages.

And my wife, Sandra, whose mind and character and support, as always, were like shelter.

My deep and humble gratitude.



## *Author's Note*

The scientific names of northern animals and plants, and geographic coordinates for named places in the North, are listed in the appendices. Bibliographic information is in the text itself, in footnotes, in the Notes section beginning on page 417, and in a selected bibliography on page 445, depending on where its appearance is most appropriate. Maps in the Maps section are cartographically accurate. Maps in the text are mostly simplified sketches and not drawn to scale. Eskimo terms, unless otherwise noted, are from the Inuktitut dialects of the eastern Canadian Arctic. Eskimo words in common English usage, such as "iglu" (house), "kayak," and "qamutiik" (sledge) are not italicized.

## PREFACE

BEYOND A REGARD for the landscape itself, this book finds its origin in two moments.

One summer evening I was camped in the western Brooks Range of Alaska with a friend. From the ridge where we had pitched our tent we looked out over tens of square miles of rolling tundra along the southern edge of the calving grounds of the Western Arctic caribou herd. During those days we observed not only caribou and wolves, which we'd come to study, but wolverine and red fox, ground squirrels, delicate-legged whimbrels and aggressive jaegers, all in the unfoldings of their obscure lives. One night we watched in awe as a young grizzly bear tried repeatedly to force its way past a yearling wolf standing guard alone before a den of young pups. The bear eventually gave up and went on its way. We watched snowy owls and rough-legged hawks hunt and caribou drift like smoke through the valley.

On the evening I am thinking about—it was breezy there on Ilingnorak Ridge, and cold; but the late-night sun, small as a kite in the northern sky, poured forth an energy that burned against my cheekbones—it was on that evening that I went on a walk for the first time among the tundra birds. They all build their nests on the ground, so their vulnerability is extreme. I gazed down at a single horned lark no bigger than my fist. She stared back resolute as iron. As I approached, golden plovers abandoned their nests in hysterical

ploys, artfully feigning a broken wing to distract me from the woven grass cups that couched their pale, darkly speckled eggs. Their eggs glowed with a soft, pure light, like the window light in a Vermeer painting. I marveled at this intense and concentrated beauty on the vast table of the plain. I walked on to find Lapland longspurs as still on their nests as stones, their dark eyes gleaming. At the nest of two snowy owls I stopped. These are more formidable animals than plovers. I stood motionless. The wild glare in their eyes receded. One owl settled back slowly over its three eggs, with an aura of primitive alertness. The other watched me, and immediately sought a bond with my eyes if I started to move.

I took to bowing on these evening walks. I would bow slightly with my hands in my pockets, toward the birds and the evidence of life in their nests—because of their fecundity, unexpected in this remote region, and because of the serene arctic light that came down over the land like breath, like breathing.

I remember the wild, dedicated lives of the birds that night and also the abandon with which a small herd of caribou crossed the Kokolik River to the northwest, the incident of only a few moments. They pranced through like wild mares, kicking up sheets of water across the evening sun and shaking it off on the far side like huge dogs, a bloom of spray that glittered in the air around them like grains of mica.

I remember the press of light against my face. The explosive skitter of calves among grazing caribou. And the warm intensity of the eggs beneath these resolute birds. Until then, perhaps because the sun was shining in the very middle of the night, so out of tune with my own customary perception, I had never known how benign sunlight could be. How forgiving. How run through with compassion in a land that bore so eloquently the evidence of centuries of winter.

During those summer days on Ilingnorak Ridge there was no dark night. Darkness never came. The birds were born. They flourished, and then flew south in the wake of the caribou.

The second incident is more fleeting. It occurred one night

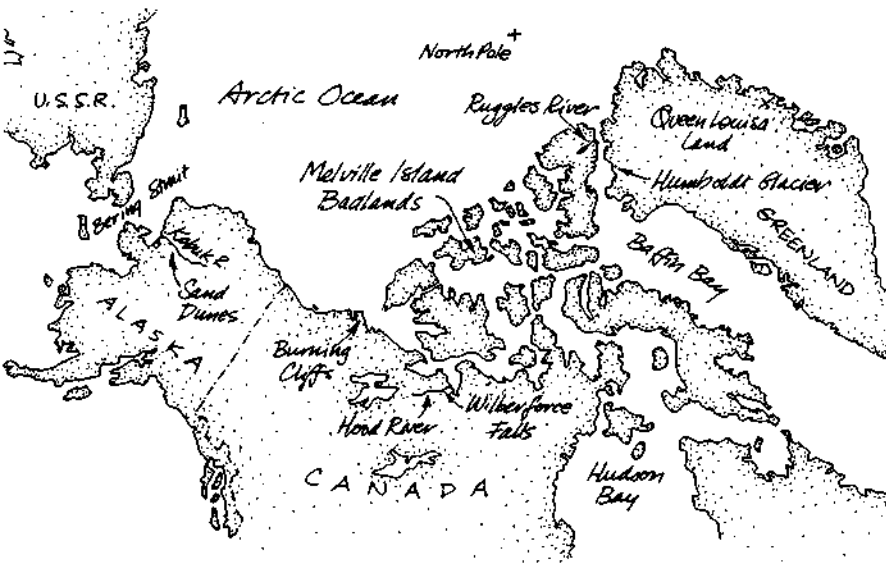
when I was being driven past a graveyard in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Among the gravestones was one marking the burial place of Edward Israel, a shy young man who sailed north in 1881 with Lieutenant Adolphus Greely. Greely and his men established a base camp on Eilesmere Island, 450 miles from the North Pole, and explored the surrounding territory in the spring of 1882. A planned relief expedition failed to reach them that summer, and also failed again the next year. Desperate, Greely's party of twenty-five retreated south, hopeful of being met by a rescue party in 1884. They wintered at Cape Sabine, Eilesmere Island, where sixteen of them died of starvation and scurvy, another committed suicide, and one man was executed for stealing food. Israel, the expedition's astronomer, died on May 27, 1884, three weeks before the others were rescued. The survivors remembered him as the most congenial person among them.

I remember looking out the back window of the car that evening and seeing Israel's grave in the falling light. What had this man hoped to find? What sort of place did he think lay out there before him on that bright June morning in 1881 when the *Proteus* slipped its moorings at Saint John's, Newfoundland?

No one is able to say, of course. He was drawn on by the fixations of his own imagination, as were John Davis and William Baffin before him and as Robert Peary and Vilhjalmur Stefansson would be after him. Perhaps he intended to make his mark as a scientist, to set his teeth in that high arctic landscape and come home like Darwin to a sedate and contemplative life, in the farmlands of southern Michigan. Perhaps he merely hungered after the unusual. We can only imagine that he desired something, the fulfillment of some personal and private dream, to which he pinned his life.

Israel was buried with great public feeling and patriotic rhetoric. His gravestone reads

IN LIFE A TRUE CHILD OF GOD  
IN DEATH A HERO



These two incidents came back to me often in the four or five years that I traveled in the Arctic. The one, timeless and full of light, reminded me of sublime innocence, of the innate beauty of undisturbed relationships. The other, a dream gone awry, reminded me of the long human struggle, mental and physical, to come to terms with the Far North. As I traveled, I came to believe that people's desires and aspirations were as much a part of the land as the wind, solitary animals, and the bright fields of stone and tundra. And, too, that the land itself existed quite apart from these.

The physical landscape is baffling in its ability to transcend whatever we would make of it. It is as subtle in its expression as turns of the mind, and larger than our grasp; and yet it is still knowable. The mind, full of curiosity and analysis, disassembles a landscape and then reassembles the pieces—the nod of a flower, the color of the night sky, the murmur of an animal—trying to

fathom its geography. At the same time the mind is trying to find its place within the land, to discover a way to dispel its own sense of estrangement.

The particular section of the Arctic I became concerned with extends from Bering Strait in the west to Davis Strait in the east. It includes great, unrelieved stretches of snow and ice that in summer become plains of open water and an ocean that is the tundra, a tawny island beneath the sky. But there are, too, surprising and riveting sights: Wilberforce Falls on the Hood River suddenly tumbles 160 feet into a wild canyon in the midst of the Canadian tundra, and its roar can be heard for miles. Humboldt Glacier, a towering, 50-mile-long sea margin of the Greenland ice sheet, calves icebergs into Kane Basin with gargantuan and implacable force. The badlands of east-central Melville Island, an eroded country of desert oranges, of muted yellows and reds, reminds a traveler of canyons and arroyos in southern Utah. And there are places more exotic, like the Ruggles River, which flows out of Lake Hazen on Ellesmere Island in winter and runs 2000 feet through the Stygian darkness, wreathed in frost smoke, before it disappears underneath its own ice. South of Cape Bathurst and west of the Horton River in the Northwest Territories, bituminous shale fires that have been burning underground for hundreds of years make those coastal hills seem like a vast, smoldering heap of industrial slag. South of the central Kobuk River, one hundred foot dunes rise above hundreds of square miles of shifting sand. In East Greenland lies an arctic oasis called Queen Louisa Land, a valley of wild grasses and summer wildflowers surrounded by the walls of the Greenland ice cap.

The Arctic, overall, has the classic lines of a desert landscape: spare, balanced, extended, and quiet. In the Queen Elizabeth Islands the well-drained tundra plains and low-lying bogs more familiar in the south give way to expanses of weathered rock and gravel, and the illusion of a desert is even more complete. On Baffin and Ellesmere islands and in northern Alaska, sharply pitched

arctic mountain ranges, which retain their remoteness even as you stand within them, complete a pervasive suggestion of austerity. The apparent monotony of the land is relieved, however, by weather systems moving through, and by the activities of animals, particularly of birds and caribou. And because so much of the country stands revealed, and because sunlight passing through the dustless air renders its edges with such unusual sharpness, animals linger before the eye. And their presence is vivid.

Like other landscapes that initially appear barren, arctic tundra can open suddenly, like the corolla of a flower, when any intimacy with it is sought. One begins to notice spots of brilliant red, orange, and green, for example, among the monotonic browns of a tundra tussock. A wolf spider lunges at a glistening beetle. A shred of muskox wool lies inert in the lavender blooms of a saxifrage. When Alwin Pederson, a Danish naturalist, first arrived on the northeast coast of Greenland, he wrote, "I must admit to strange feelings at the sight of this godforsaken desert of stone." Before he left, however, he was writing of muskoxen grazing in lush grass that grew higher than the animals' heads in Jameson Land, and of the stark beauty of nunataks, the ice-free spires of rock that pierce the Pleistocene stillness of the Greenland ice cap. I, like Pederson, when stooping to pick up the gracile rib bone of an arctic hare, would catch sudden and unexpected sight of the silken cocoon of an arctic caterpillar.

The wealth of biological detail on the tundra dispels any feeling that the land is empty; and its likeness to a stage suggests impending events. On a summer walk, the wind-washed air proves depthlessly clear. Time and again you come upon the isolated and succinct evidence of life—animal tracks, the undigested remains of a ptarmigan in an owl's casting, a patch of barren-ground willow nibbled nearly leafless by arctic hares. You are afforded the companionship of birds, which follow after you. (They know you are an animal; sooner or later you will turn up something to eat.) Sandpipers scatter before you, screaming *tuituek*, an Eskimo name for them. Coming awkwardly down a scree slope of frost-riven *lime-*

stone you make a glass-tinkling clatter—and at a distance a tundra grizzly rises on its hind legs to study you; the dish-shaped paws of its front legs deathly still, the stance so human it is unnerving.

Along creek washouts, in the western Arctic especially, you might stumble upon a mammoth tusk. Or in the eastern Arctic find undisturbed the ring of stones used by a hunter 1500 years ago to hold down the edge of his skin tent. These old Dorset camps, located along the coasts where arctic people have been traveling for four millennia, are poignant with their suggestion of the timeless determination of mankind. On rare occasions a traveler might come upon the more imposing stone foundations of a large house abandoned by Thule-culture people in the twelfth century. (The cold, dry arctic air might have preserved, even down to its odor, the remains of a ringed seal killed and eaten by them 800 years ago.) More often, one comes upon the remains of a twentieth-century camp, artifacts far less engaging than a scrap of worked caribou bone, or carved wood, or skewered hide at a Dorset or Thule site. But these artifacts disintegrate just as slowly—red tins of Prince Albert brand crimp-cut tobacco, cans of Pet evaporated milk and Log Cabin maple syrup. In the most recent camps one finds used flashlight batteries in clusters like animal droppings, and a bewildering variety of spent rifle and shotgun ammunition.

You raise your eyes from these remains, from whatever century, to look away. The land as far as you can see is rung with a harmonious authority, the enduring force of its natural history, of which these camps are so much a part. But the most recent evidence is vaguely disturbing. It does not derive in any clear way from the land. Its claim to being part of the natural history of the region seems, somehow, false.

It is hard to travel in the Arctic today and not be struck by the evidence of recent change. What is found at modern campsites along the coast points to the sudden arrival of a foreign technology—new tools and a new way of life for the local people. The initial adjustments to this were fairly simple; the rate of change, however,

has continued to accelerate. Now the adjustments required are bewildering. And the new tools bring with them ever more complicated sets of beliefs. The native culture, from Saint Lawrence Island to Greenland, is today in a state of rapid economic reorganization and of internally disruptive social readjustment. In a recent article about the residents of Nunivak Island, for example, a scientist wrote that the dietary shift from wild to store-bought foods (with the many nutritional and social complications involved) is proceeding so quickly it is impossible to pin down. "By the time this paper appears in print," he wrote, "much of the information in it will be of historical value only."

Industrial changes have also come to the Arctic, following the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, in 1968: the 800-mile-long trans-Alaska pipeline itself, with its recent Kuparuk extension; base camps for oil exploration on Canada's Melville Island and Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula; huge lead-zinc mining operations on northern Baffin and Little Cornwallis islands; hundreds of miles of new roads; and increased ship, air, and truck traffic. The region's normally violent and unpredictable weather, its extreme cold and long periods of darkness, the great distance to supply depots, and the problem of stabilizing permanent structures over permafrost (which melts and shifts in erratic ways) have made the cost of these operations astronomical—indeed, in Canada they could not even be contemplated without massive assistance from the federal government.

Seen as widely separated dots and lines on a map, these recent, radical changes do not appear to amount to very much. But their rippling effect in the settlements and villages of the North—their economic, psychological, and social impact—is acute. And their success, though marginal and in some instances artificial, encourages additional schemes for development.\* Of special concern to local residents is a growing concentration of power in the

---

\*: For a summary of specific arctic problems, see note 1.

hands of people with enormous economic resources but a poorly developed geographic sense of the region. A man from Tuktoyaktuk, a village near the mouth of the Mackenzie River, told me a pointed story. In the 1950s he traveled regularly up and down the coast by dogsled. When a distant early warning (DEW) line radar station went up along his accustomed route, he decided to stop to see what it was. The military men welcomed him not as a resident of the region but as a figure of arctic fable. They enthusiastically fed his dogs a stack of raw steaks. Each time the man came, they pounded him on the back and fed his dogs piles of steak. Their largess seemed so odd and his rapport with them so unrealistic he stopped coming. For months afterward, however, he had tremendous difficulty controlling the dogs anytime they passed near the place.

Passing through the villages, even traveling across the uninhabited land, one cannot miss the evidence of upheaval, nor avoid being wrenched by it. The depression it engenders, because so much of it seems a heedless imposition on the land and on the people, a rude invasion, can lead one to despair. I brooded, like any traveler, over these things; but the presence of the land, the sheer weight of it before the senses, more often drew me away from the contemporary issues. What, I wondered, had compelled me to bow to a horned lark? How do people imagine the landscapes they find themselves in? How does the land shape the imaginations of the people who dwell in it? How does desire itself, the desire to comprehend, shape knowledge? These questions seemed to me to go deeper than the topical issues, to underlie any consideration of them.

In pursuit of answers I traveled with people of differing dispositions. With Eskimos hunting narwhals off northern Baffin Island and walrus in Bering Sea. With marine ecologists on hundreds of miles of coastal and near-shore surveys. With landscape painters in the Canadian Archipelago. In the company of rough-necks, drilling for oil on the winter ice in high winds at —30°F; and with the cosmopolitan crew of a freighter, sailing up the west

coast of Greenland and into the Northwest Passage. They each assessed the land differently—the apparent emptiness of the tundra, which ran out like a shimmering mirage in the Northern Ocean; the blue-black vault of the winter sky, a cold beauty alive with scintillating stars; a herd of muskoxen, pivoting together on a hilltop to make a defensive stand, their long guard hairs swirling around them like a single, huge wave of dark water; a vein of lead-zinc ore glinting like tiny mirrors in a damp, Mesozoic wall beneath the surface of Little Cornwallis Island; the moaning and wailing in the winter sea ice as the ocean's crust warped and shattered in the crystalline air. All of it, all that the land is and evokes, its actual meaning as well as its metaphorical reverberation, was and is understood differently.

These different views make a human future in that northern landscape a matter of conjecture, and it is here that one encounters dreams, projections of hope. The individual's dream, whether it be so private a wish as that the joyful determination of nesting arctic birds might infuse a distant friend weary of life, or a magnanimous wish, that a piece of scientific information wrested from the landscape might serve one's community—in individual dreams is the hope that one's own life will not have been lived for nothing. The very much larger dream, that of a people, is a story we have been carrying with us for millennia. It is a narrative of determination and hope that follows a question: What will we do as the wisdom of our past bears down on our future? It is a story of ageless conversation, not only conversation among ourselves about what we mean and wish to do, but a conversation held with the land—our contemplation and wonder at a prairie thunderstorm, or before the jagged line of a young mountain, or at the sudden rise of ducks from an isolated lake. We have been telling ourselves the story of what *ive* represent in the land for 40,000 years. At the heart of this story, I think, is a simple, abiding belief: it is possible to live wisely on the land, and to live well. And in behaving respectfully toward all that the land contains, it is possible to imagine a stifling ignorance falling away from us.

Crossing the tree line to the Far North, one leaves behind the boreal owl clutching its frozen prey to its chest feathers to thaw it. Ahead lies an open, wild landscape, pointed off on the maps with arresting and anomalous names: Brother John Glacier and Cape White Handkerchief. Navy Board Inlet, Teddy Bear Island, and the Zebra Cliffs. Dexterity Fiord, Saint Patrick Canyon, Starvation Cove. Eskimos hunt the ringed seal, still, in the broad bays of the Sons of the Clergy and Royal Astronomical Society islands.

This is a land where airplanes track icebergs the size of Cleveland and polar bears fly down out of the stars. It is a region, like the desert, rich with metaphor, with adumbration. In a simple bow from the waist before the nest of the horned lark, you are able to stake your life, again, in what you dream.

# ARCTIC DREAMS