

A [sample entry](#) from the

# **Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature**

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theology to the legitimization of natural science, the task of classification, and hopes for a better future. For example, in the preface to a 1753 study of plant species, he noted,

the WORLD is the Almighty's theater . . . we must research these creations by the creator, which the Highest has linked to our well-being in such a way that we shall not need to miss anything of all the good things we need . . . [E]ach object ought to be clearly grasped and clearly named, for if one neglects this, the great amount of things will necessarily overwhelm us and, lacking a common language, all exchange of knowledge will be in vain (Linnaeus in Koerner 1999: 93).

Yet in spite of his Lutheran heritage and dutiful church-going, he was not orthodox in terms of belief. The theological faculty at Uppsala often accused him of conflating God and nature in ways that approached pantheism, and private writings exhibit doubts about doctrines such as the atonement, resurrection, and an afterlife. Thus he is perhaps best understood as a transitional figure whose rhapsodic theism in published works gives way to private doubts and naturalistic views of humanity that are in many ways decidedly modern.

For example, while Linnaeus largely recapitulated the medieval view that human beings stood at the head of the "Great Chain of Being" (i.e., the top of the hierarchy of organic life), he was a significant player in the process through which philosophical and theological concern for the "rational animal" (i.e., in classical and scholastic thought) became the study of a type of particularly clever ape under the aegis of natural history. In the tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* (1758), he introduced three of the enduring terms in the taxonomy of human beings – *Homo sapiens*, *Mammalia*, and *Primates*. Implicit in these categories was Linnaeus' conviction, articulated throughout his later writings, that there were no significant physical characteristics that distinguished human beings from apes. In a letter to a friend, he noted, "If I were to call man ape or vice versa, I should bring down all the theologians on my head. But perhaps I should do it according to the rules of science" (Linnaeus in Frangsmyr, et al. 1983: 172). Although more cautious than later biologists, his classification strategy ultimately took aim on one of the inherited conceits of the Western tradition, that human beings were outside of the natural system by virtue of their rational or spiritual qualities.

Subsequent generations have hailed Linnaeus as one of the great "system builders" in biological science whose achievements are analogous to Newton's influence on physics. In Sweden this reverence has been even more pronounced. During the nineteenth century, reverential biographers and public celebrations of his achievements

elevated him to the status of national hero, and more recently, the country has undertaken the careful restoration of his beloved gardens in Uppsala. In England and America various Linnaean Societies continue to advance the study of nature. And of course, every student in a basic biology class pays a kind of tribute to Linnaeus by learning to name and categorize species using the basic principles that he established. In terms of religion, the legacy of Linnaeus is more ambiguous. The theological beliefs that sustained his philosophy of nature would be deemed largely irrelevant to subsequent generations of biologists, particularly after the Darwinian revolution. Some religious conservatives, however, still invoke his ideas on the fixity of species to bolster their attacks on evolutionary concepts. On the more liberal side of things, the spirit of Linnaeus' natural philosophy is perhaps more influential than the content. At once scientifically rigorous and theologically reverent, his efforts remain a source of inspiration for at least a few *Homo sapiens* that also fancy themselves *Homo religiosus*.

Lisle Dalton

#### Further Reading

Frangsmyr, Tore, Sten Lindroth, Gunnar Eriksson and Gunnar Broberg, eds. *Linnaeus: The Man and His Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Koerner, Lisbet. *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

See also: Darwin, Charles; Science.

#### Lopez, Barry (1945–)

Born in New York in 1945, Barry Holstun Lopez spent most of his first ten years in California, returning to the West after college at Notre Dame for graduate studies in folklore in Oregon. Deciding for a life of writing rather than an academic career, he settled on the McKenzie River in western Oregon. His writing is primarily in the genres of short stories and natural history essays; he has received literary awards for both and is one of the leading U.S. contemporary ecological writers.

Best known among his non-fiction works are *Of Wolves and Men*, *Arctic Dreams*, and the collection of essays, *Crossing Open Ground*. His fiction includes *Desert Notes*, *River Notes*, *Field Notes*, and *Winter Count*. Central to all his work is the landscape – whether of Oregon or other parts of the U.S. West or the Americas, the Arctic or Antarctic. Whatever the location, his work aims to create a palpable awareness of a landscape that is rich in details and in mystery, in facts and in meaning. In "Landscape and Narrative" he describes an external and an internal landscape.

The external landscape is the one we see – not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of the day, but also its plants and animals in season, its wealth, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution” (Lopez 1989: 64).

Both the external and internal landscapes become comprehensible only by understanding the relationships between and within them, which requires sensuous participation as well as mental reflection. It is the patterns that he believes inhere in these relationships that create a meaningful, trustworthy universe.

To draw the reader into the experience of a particular landscape, Lopez fills his books with scientific information about geography, plants, and animals, including their migration and socializing patterns; as well as information about humans: their mythic stories and artistic creations and their differences (e.g., between Eskimo and European orientations), their scientific research and technological developments, their expeditions – and his reflections on all of these. A *New York Times* review of *Arctic Dreams* said that it is “a book about the Arctic North in the way that *Moby-Dick* is a novel about whales” (Kakutani 1986). I think there are many ways in which this is not true. Although Lopez’s goal is certainly to discover more about humans through his explorations of the land, the landscape does not serve primarily as a springboard to reflect on human meaning; rather, it is only by deeply understanding the whole process of which humans are an inter-related part that they can come to understand themselves. He reports that as he traveled through the Arctic, he came to the realization “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” (Lopez 1986: xxii). Humans can be understood, then, only as part of the landscape.

This land that exists apart from humans can be approached imaginatively, though not definitively. Lopez could be accused of anthropomorphism as he imagines what it would be like to be a wolf or when he says of migrating geese, “They flew beautifully each morning in the directions they intended, movements of desires . . . In that hour their lives seemed flush with yearning” (Lopez 1986: 158). However, rather than collapsing animals into humans, what he is trying to do is open our human imaginings to the full and rich *Umwelt*, or life-world, that a wolf has quite beyond our imaginings (Lopez 1978: 285) and enable us to allow for the mystery that geese too may have desires, not known by us.

Lopez seldom speaks directly about religion in relation to this quest for openness to the world, though his works are filled with a sense of “something more” (as Williams James defined religion), which one comes upon in the landscape, even though it remains elusive. Nor do his

works invite a translation into religious tenants. Such categorization loses the rich reality of humans fully living in and with the landscape, within which the sacred reveals itself. He says he hopes his writing will “contribute to a literature of hope” (Lopez 1998: 14), which seems to depend on humans beings recognizing their place in and responsibility to the whole and the spiritual meaning that is rooted in the whole, which lies beyond human ability to comprehend or control.

Whatever evaluation we finally make of a stretch of land . . . no matter how profound or accurate, we will find it inadequate. The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know. Our obligation toward it then becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard . . . To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane, and you know the land knows you are there (Lopez 1986: 228).

Lynn Ross-Bryant

#### Further Reading

- Aton, Jim. “Interview with Barry Lopez.” *Western American Literature* (Spring 1986).
- Kakutani, Michiko. “Review.” *New York Times* 12 February 1986, C21.
- Lopez, Barry H. *About This Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Lopez, Barry. *Crossing Open Ground*. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Lopez, Barry H. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1986.
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- See also: *Memoir and Nature Writing*.

#### Lost Worlds

Remote, unexplored or allegedly “disappeared” regions of the natural and cultural world have been prominent subjects of mytho-poetic discourses throughout human history. The multifarious conceptions concerning “sunken cities,” “islands,” or “continents,” and similar “lost worlds,” have been (and still are) prominent examples for the construction of “utopias,” “paradises,” and “El Dorados.” They have led to influential motifs in colonial expansion or exotic imaginations about foreign countries and civilizations, and in many instances, evolutionary