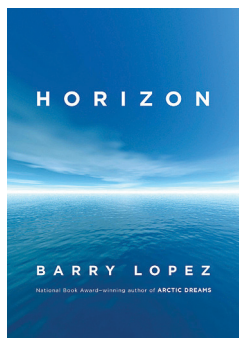


## Horizon

By Barry Lopez. 2019. Vintage Canada. 572 pages, 21.00 CAD, Paper, 13.99 CAD, E-book.

The evening has arrived, you pour a glass of your preferred beverage, mine is aged rum, throw another log on the fire, and settle into a comfortable chair to delve into a book that takes you places that make you pause, reflect, and consider events that shape your place in this world and the horizon that lies ahead.



Lopez has spent a lifetime of travelling, questioning, and reflecting on our world and humans' place in it historically, currently, and in the future. *Horizon* might be described as Lopez's thesis pulling together a life's work.

*Horizon* has a prologue and introduction that establish the relatively serious and reflective tone of the book's six chapters, each with a particular narrative. Chapter 1, Cape Foulweather on the Coast of

Oregon, discusses Captain Cook's ocean voyages of discovery. Chapter 2, Skraeling Island in Nunavut, the archaeology of hardy Thule culture, now extinct. Chapter 3, Puerto Ayora in the Galápagos Islands, considers Darwin's insights of an evolving world. Chapter 4, Jackal Camp in Kenya, the archaeology of early humans. Chapter 5, Port Arthur to Botany Bay in Australia, reflects on how humans treat each other, examining the United Kingdom's repugnant export of criminals and colonization's contempt of Indigenous cultures. Chapter 6, Graves Nunataks to Port Famine Road in Antarctica, reminds us of the endless horizon of what remains to be discovered. These are places Lopez has visited one or more times and which he has thought about deeply and broadly in terms of their physical and biological histories and trajectories and how humanity is embedded within these.

*Horizon* is a testament to Lopez having kept detailed and copious notes and drawings over the course of his life. His descriptions of places and events from decades ago are mesmerizing: you can feel the wind

and rain, see the foggy coastline, hear the waves, and feel the mood evoked by the impending storm. The stories draw you in, conjuring up analogous memories of places, events, and encounters, exhorting you to pause and reflect on the complex thoughts and ideas Lopez places before you. The book it is not, therefore, a jolly travel story providing a superficial discourse of the people and places Lopez has visited. If you want a fun and easy read, try one of Bill Bryson's books, such as *A Walk in the Woods* (1998, Broadway Books).

"The whitecaps on a windy day collapse, the ships' wakes disappear, the skittering takeoff track of a seabird fades out, leaving no record of its having been there" (p. 83). These words evoke memories for me of a chilly September day standing in a palsa bog in a remote area of the Hudson Bay lowlands near Hawley Lake. The terrain was open, with short, narrow Black Spruce; I was facing the orange sun emitting a little warmth far off on the horizon. A movement on the spruce beside me caught my eye: a small black spider moved around the narrow trunk, placing itself strategically to catch the last of sun's heat. These are singular moments in time, when the physical and biological world of the universe near and far merge in a singular horizon. And over the years I return to that memory and wonder is the palsa bog still there, are the hummocks collapsing as climate change melts the ice lenses, and did the spider survive the winter to produce progeny that continue to survive in a changing environment?

Given Lopez's sensitivity to his fellow humans, I was surprised he largely uses the male gender when referring to humanity. So as not to be annoyed by every occurrence, and there are many, I merely read phrases such as "all of mankind" as "all of humankind" and "him" as "her" or "them". Also, although *Horizon* is science-based, it is frustrating that imperial measure is used without metric equivalents, meaning you may need to remind yourself how cold minus 20° Fahrenheit is. If you enjoy a book that sends you searching for definitions of the words used, Lopez will not disappoint. For example, while I could visualize "bumptious overweight Americans" (p. 232), the first adjective was not in my vocabulary,

nor were "stygianimps" (p. 226); "the adumbration of something quite new" (p. 301); "His forehead, cheeks and chin are neatly ribbed with small cicatrices" (p. 320); or "committing to the eschatology of an organized religion" (p. 256). The list is so long I sometimes wished the book had a glossary, for cantus, leb-ensraum, plosive, susurration, etc.

As stories unfold in *Horizon*, simple, profound, and impartial statements of fact convey weighty lessons. For example, we think of *Australopithecus* species, which emerged four to five million years ago, as our ancestors; however, the more relevant period of human evolution is the emergence of culturally complex *Homo sapiens* in the Horn of Africa around 55 000 years B.P. Within a very short evolutionary period, these more recent ancestors proliferated globally, displacing all hominid competitors and much of everything else on the planet. What is to become of our evolutionary tree—will our branch be as long as that of our *Australopithecus* ancestors or a short twig?

*Horizon* considers elders Lopez has encountered around the globe. Elders are typically held in high regard within traditional cultures and "Their feelings toward all life around them are more tender, their capacity for empathy greater" (p. 312). Are these the qualities of today's 'leaders' who inspire economic growth and wealth? Can we not see where they are leading humankind? But there is hope with leaders, such as New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern, who show genuine human empathy and real concern for our planet. There is a recurrent theme in *Horizon*, does humankind have the wisdom, the imagination, and the intelligence to dismantle the apparatuses that are leading us into a frightening future of continued habitat destruction, climate change, and a rising tide of human suffering? Lopez leaves us questioning the shared horizon of humans in the 21st century, the challenges and the hope we ourselves create. Frighteningly, the horizon critically important to our survival, is insignificant, even trivial, within the wider horizon of our planet evolving within an expanding universe.

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