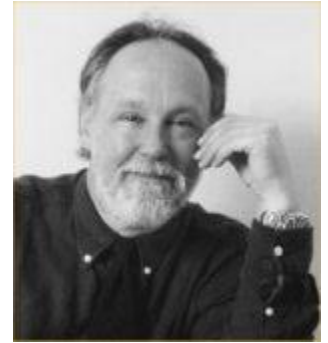


*A recipient of the National Book Award along with many other honors, American author Barry Lopez is best known for his books and essays about the "relationship between the physical landscape and human culture."*

*In this excerpt from Arctic Dreams (1986), Lopez traces the process by which North American caribou "trek hundreds of miles each year between their winter range near the tree line and well-defined calving grounds on the tundra." Observe how Lopez maintains our interest through varied sentence structures as well as precise descriptive and informative details.*



### Migration of the Caribou from Arctic Dreams, by Barry Lopez

Scientists are uncertain what starts caribou on their northward journey--knowledge that they have stored enough fat to carry them through, perhaps. They endure spring blizzards on their journeys and cross ice-choked rivers with great determination and a sure sense of bearing, but they also choose paths of least resistance over the land, often following in each other's tracks through deep snow. Pregnant cows are normally in the lead; mature bulls may be as much as a month behind the cows, or never arrive at the calving grounds at all. By the end of their arduous journey the females are thin and tattered-looking. Behind them, in places where they have had to cross rivers in a stage of breakup, there may be the carcasses of hundreds of drowned and fatally injured animals. Their calving grounds, writes biologist George Calef, appear "bleak and inhospitable. Meltwater lies in pools on the frozen ground, the land is often shrouded in fog, and the wind whistles unceasingly among the stunted plants and bare rocks." The advantages of these dismal regions, however, are several. The number of predators is low, wolves having dropped away from the herds at more suitable locations for denning to the south. Food plants are plentiful. And these grounds either offer better protection from spring snowstorms or experience fewer storms overall than adjacent regions.

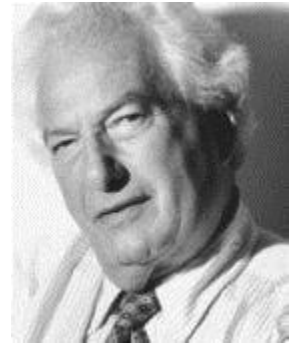
Most calves are born within a few days of each other, and calving occurs at least a month before swarms of emergent mosquitoes, blackflies, warble flies, and botflies embark on a harassment of the caribou that seems merciless to a human observer. If one were to think of events that typify arctic life--the surge of energy one feels with daily gains of ten or fifteen minutes of sunlight in the spring, or waking up one morning to find the ocean frozen--one would also include that feeling of relief that descends over a caribou herd when a wind comes up and puts hordes of weak-flying mosquitoes to the ground.

After calving, cows and their offspring join immature animals, barren cows, and the bulls in "postcalving" aggregations of 75,000 or more animals, their numbers stretching from horizon to horizon. They trek slowly south, breaking up into smaller herds. The first fall storms catch them in open country, and in the cold, snowy air these "gray shepherds of the tundra," as the Alaskan poet John Haines calls them, "pass like islands of smoke." They take shelter in the short timber of the taiga for the winter.

After the herds have gone, the calving grounds can seem like the most deserted places on earth, even if you can sense strongly that the caribou will be back next year. When they do return, hardly anything will have changed. A pile of caribou droppings may take thirty years to remineralize on the calving grounds. The carcass of a wolf-killed caribou may lie undisturbed for three or four years. Time pools in the stillness here and then dissipates. The country is emptied of movement.

This passage appears in Chapter Five ("Migration: The Corridors of Breath") of *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*, by Barry Lopez (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1986; reprinted in a Vintage paperback, 2001).

*Since the publication of Catch-22 in 1961, the title of Joseph Heller's first novel has become a byword for the absurdity of war and, by extension, any senseless or illogical circumstance. In these two paragraphs from the opening chapter, we learn how Yossarian, a U.S. Air Force pilot in World War II, fights off boredom in a military hospital. Consider how the steps involved in his private "war" on language (a kind of process analysis) introduce the novel's theme of the absurd response to an absurd predicament.*



from Catch-22\* by Joseph Heller

All the officer patients in the ward were forced to censor letters written by all the enlisted-men patients, who were kept in residence in wards of their own. It was a monotonous job, and Yossarian was disappointed to learn that the lives of enlisted men were only slightly more interesting than the lives of officers. After the first day he had no curiosity at all. To break the monotony he invented games. Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but a, an and the. That erected more dynamic intralinear tensions, he felt, and in just about every case left a message far more universal. Soon he was proscribing parts of salutations and signatures and leaving the text untouched. One time he blacked out all but the salutation "Dear Mary" from a letter, and at the bottom he wrote, "I yearn for you tragically. A. T. Tappman, Chaplain, U.S. Army." A. T. Tappman was the group chaplain's name.

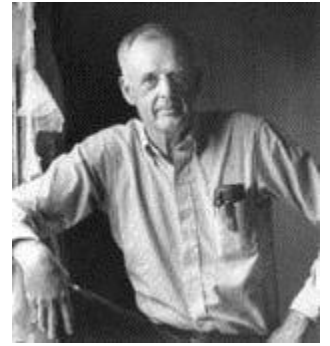
When he had exhausted all possibilities in the letters, he began attacking the names and addresses on the envelopes, obliterating whole homes and streets, annihilating entire metropolises with careless flicks of his wrist as though he were God. Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer's name. Most letters he didn't read at all. On those he didn't read at all he wrote his own name. On those he did read he wrote, "Washington Irving." When that grew monotonous he wrote, "Irving Washington." Censoring the envelopes had serious repercussions, produced a ripple of anxiety on some ethereal military echelon that floated a C.I.D. man back into the ward posing as a patient. They all knew he was a C.I.D. man because he kept inquiring about an officer named Irving or Washington and because after his first day there he wouldn't censor letters. He found them too monotonous.

\* Joseph Heller's Catch-22 was first published by Simon & Schuster in 1961. It is currently available in a Simon & Schuster Classic edition.

*One of America's foremost essayists and social critics, Wendell Berry is a farmer in northeastern Kentucky and an agrarian writer in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey. In a recent interview with Thomas P. Healy (in Counterpunch, April 15/16, 2006), Berry described the "very serious cultural and economic failure" of the industrial world:*

*We're living at the expense of basic or primary workers, primary producers. We're living off the backs of small farmers and Central American and Mexican migrants. And all the while we're congratulating ourselves for getting over slavery. And that hasn't happened.*

*In the following excerpt from his essay "A Few Words for Motherhood," Berry describes the process of assisting at the birth of a calf--an experience that leaves the author "feeling instructed and awed and pleased." Berry's paratactic style, characterized by straightforward diction, is deceptively simple.*



from A Few Words for Motherhood\* by Wendell Berry

My wife and son and I find the heifer in a far corner of the field. In maybe two hours of labor she has managed to give birth to one small foot. We know how it has been with her. Time and again she has lain down and heaved at her burden, and got up and turned and smelled the ground. She is a heifer--how does she know that something is supposed to be there?

It takes some doing even for the three of us to get her into the barn. Her orders are to be alone, and she does all in her power to obey. But finally we shut the door behind her and get her into a stall. She isn't wild; once she is confined it isn't even necessary to tie her. I wash in a bucket of icy water and soap my right hand and forearm. She is quiet now. And so are we humans--worried, and excited, too, for if there is a chance for failure here, there is also a chance for success.

I loop a bale string onto the calf's exposed foot, knot the string short around a stick which my son then holds. I press my hand gently into the birth canal until I find the second foot and then, a little further on, a nose. I loop a string around the second foot, fasten on another stick for a handhold. And then we pull. The heifer stands and pulls against us for a few seconds, then gives up and goes down. We brace ourselves the best we can into our work, pulling as the heifer pushes. Finally the head comes, and then, more easily, the rest.

We clear the calf's nose, help him to breathe, and then, because the heifer has not yet stood up, we lay him on the bedding in front of her. And what always seems to me the miracle of it begins. She has never calved before. If she ever saw another cow calve, she paid little attention. She has, as we humans say, no education and no experience. And yet she recognizes the calf as her own, and knows what to do for it. Some heifers don't, but most do, as this one does. Even before she gets up, she begins to lick it about the nose and face with loud, vigorous swipes of her tongue. And all the while she utters a kind of moan, meant to comfort, encourage, and reassure--or so I understand it.

\* "A Few Words for Motherhood" appears in the collection *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural*, published by North Point Press, 1982