

ism, with its aversion to any form of governmental coercion of individuals, presents one such obstacle. And the long-established political practice of interest group brokering has seen to it that government "does not make demands on people; they make demands on it."

Formidable obstacles. But given the current shortage of "self-evident" truths, it would be a pity if Mead's ideas were ignored.

*Arts & Letters*

**ARCTIC DREAMS:  
Imagination and Desire  
in a Northern Landscape**  
by Barry Lopez  
Scribner's, 1986  
464 pp. \$22.95

The 16th-century navigator Jacques Cartier described the Arctic as "the land God gave to Cain." Lopez, author of the highly acclaimed *Of Wolves and Men* (1979), has far kinder words for the region. Having spent four years there with scientific researchers and Eskimos, he understands its attraction for both.

Braving an environment in which 32 degrees Fahrenheit is considered warm and a "night" lasts months, Eskimos speak a language that changes radically with the seasons. Thus, says Lopez, "terms for the many varieties of snow emerge in winter, while those for whaling come into use in the spring." (Indeed, the Inuktitut language is so closely tied to experience that, as religious rituals, hunting practices, and other old ways die, young Eskimos no longer understand large chunks of their elders' speech.)

The polar bear is another hardy resident of long standing, and scientists have learned a great deal about its survival skills. Although its thick white hair loses 90 percent of its insulating power when wet (a far worse performance than, say, the beaver's), scientists have found that its exterior "guard hairs" are hollow and conduct the sun's heat to the bear's black skin.

Above all, Lopez's book evokes the terrible beauty of the frigid north. The aurora borealis, solar and lunar rings, halos, coronas, and a variety of mirages give the Arctic heavens a chimerical aspect. So convincing, for instance, are the fata morgana—mirages resembling extensive mountain ranges or urban skylines—that seasoned explorers in earlier centuries "set down mountains and islands on their charts where there was nothing but empty sky."