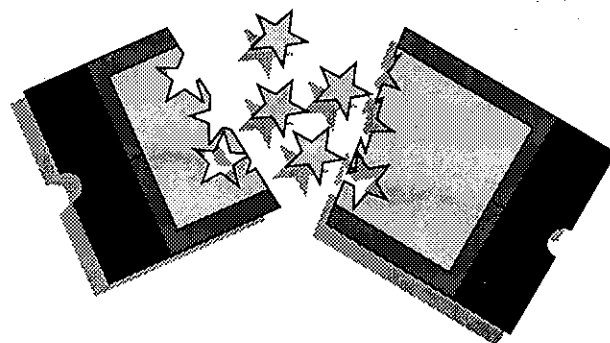


CROW AND WEASEL

by Barry Lopez
adapted by Jim Leonard, Jr.
January 25 through February 25,



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INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE
140 WEST WASHINGTON STREET
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204

LIBBY APPEL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A Wise and Wondrous Fable

The play *Crow and Weasel* is based on the novella of the same title by Barry Lopez. Beautifully illustrated by Tom Pohrt, this book appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list. The novella was adapted for the stage by playwright Jim Leonard, Jr., a native Hoosier now living and working as a playwright and screenwriter in Los Angeles. The world premiere of the play was in 1993 at Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis.

Crow and Weasel is set in a mythic time and location somewhere in the western part of the North American continent. Two young members of the tribe, Crow and Weasel, are sent on a journey north to encounter a new animal their tribe leader, Mountain Lion, has seen in a dream. This creature "travels upon the water and has no fur or feathers at all." Crow and Weasel must travel farther north than anyone has been before, "traveling to a place where daylight is born—to the land where all things begin!" Mountain Lion also entrusts Crow and Weasel with a pipe bag to carry, adding, "You are not old enough to be pipe carriers. But my dream tells me to send this with you to share with those you meet." So Crow and Weasel set off on horses, carrying the hope of their tribe along with their own youthful curiosity.

As Crow and Weasel ride north, their strengths (Crow's faith and thoughtfulness and Weasel's hunting skills) as well as their weaknesses (Crow's timidity and Weasel's boastfulness) are tested. At night around their fire they share their hopes and dreams and imagine what lies ahead. The river of Floating Ashes, which forms the northern boundary of their tribe's known territory, is difficult to cross. On the other side, the landscape changes and grows increasingly unfamiliar and frightening. Crow becomes concerned that they have lost their way. He offers a blessing to the Ones Above, who send him a sign in the form of a yellow-shafted bird who leads them northward. The trees, too, encourage them on their way.

In the course of their journey, they encounter many animals and survive many adventures, each of which teaches them a valuable lesson. They eventually find and stay many days with the boat people, who they learn are called Inuit. They share stories of customs and traditions, and exchange gifts. Finally Crow and Weasel return homeward, acquiring more knowledge from the creatures they meet and the adventures they survive. When they finally reach their village, they are ready to face further challenges, which learning and experience will help them meet. ★



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MEET BARRY LOPEZ

Barry Lopez, the author of *Crow* and *Weasel*, is well known for his previous books, *Arctic Dreams* and *Of Wolves and Men*, both works of non-fiction. He has written a number of works of fiction, essays, articles, and short stories for such publications as Harper's, The New York Times, and National Geographic. Lopez holds degrees from University of Notre Dame, University of Oregon, and Whittier College. A freelance writer since 1970, his books and stories have been translated into ten languages. He is a recipient of the National Book Award for *Arctic Dreams*, the award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, USNINSF Antarctic Service Medal, and is a Guggenheim fellow. Lopez and his wife, an artist, make their home in Oregon.

What led to the creation of *Crow* and *Weasel*?

"The story came out of my own mind, but everything in it I was taught by someone. I spend two to three months at a time living in the remote villages of indigenous peoples of North America, Africa, and Australia, seeking an understanding of their occupants and their relationship to the world."

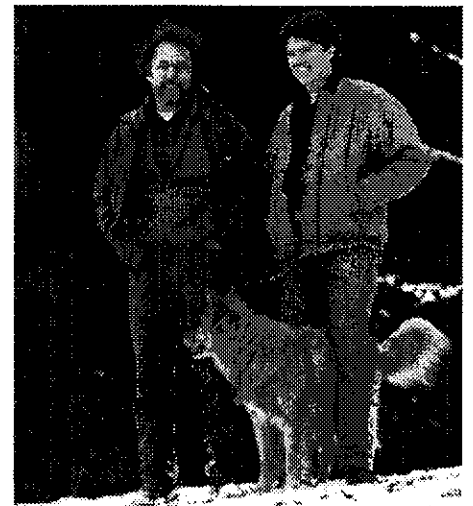
How long did it take to create *Crow* and *Weasel*?

"The concept and outline for the

story began to take shape in the late seventies about the time I contacted Tom Pohrt [the book's illustrator] regarding the illustrations. Tom felt watercolors would best portray the images, but he needed time to teach himself the medium. Over ten years the story grew and matured as we worked together. The hard-cover edition of the book was published just four years ago."

When did you become intrigued by animals and their relationships to the landscape?

"As a child growing up in California in the late 1940s and 1950s, I was mesmerized by animals, how they inhabited the landscape with me and yet they knew, felt, and were driven by forces I didn't know." ★



Author Barry Lopez and illustrator Tom Pohrt. Photo by Joseph Arcure.

Author's Notes...

Crow and Weasel is set in myth time, but one could imagine the journey that *Crow* and *Weasel* make beginning somewhere in northern Montana or southern Alberta, and their encounter with the Inuit taking place along the Thelon River, perhaps north of the boreal forest in the Northwest Territories. The story is not based, as far as I know, on any Native American legend, although its themes are ones still stressed today in various Native American communities. These include an awareness of the spiritual dimension of landscape, an emphasis on the importance of the community over the needs of the individual, and a willingness to accept and accommodate mystery in the world. The themes of tolerance and the importance of friendship, of course, are common to many cultures today.

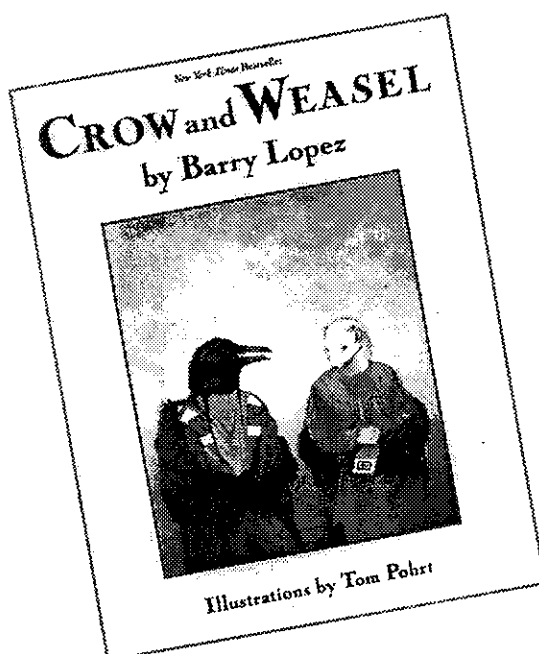
It has been my privilege over the past twenty-five years to have benefitted from the counsel, instruction, and example of indigenous people in North America, in Australia, and in Africa. My debts to them are great and their influence is apparent in *Crow and Weasel*, though I cannot ask them to accept

responsibility for a specific philosophy reflected in the story.

In traveling through remote regions of the planet with indigenous people, I have often been struck by subtle differences in the way separate groups of humans understand what it means to lead a good life, one distinguished for many by generosity, kindness, and social responsibility. There is genius in these different ways of living, of dealing with the fundamental mysteries of human existence. We benefit most here, I think, not by trying to take on the life of a different people, but by considering the knowledge that comes from other cultures as a kind of proposal, something to consider.

The friendship that grows between *Crow* and *Weasel* is a kind of friendship that might serve any two of us by its example. The measure of *Crow*'s and *Weasel*'s love becomes, eventually, the strength of their community. And the possibilities in that love—of each other, of their home landscape, of their families—seems to me a good reason to try to share their story. ★

—Barry Lopez, December 1993



I would ask you to remember one thing: the stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. That is why we place them in each other's memories. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. Never forget these obligations. —Badger, from **CROW AND WEASEL**

Issues for Discussion

1. How does the play illustrate the lesson of tolerance and respect for the traditions of those different from us?
2. What values does the play place on the exchange of gifts? Is it different from the value that we place on this action today?
3. How do Crow and Weasel learn the lessons of obligation to one another?
4. How does the play impart indigenous peoples' respect for the land? Do we still have that value today?
5. What is Grizzly Bear's lesson in the appreciation of Beauty?

It's not the beauty of the earth that sustains you, my friends — it is your relationship with it. Everything in the world is related to you. All that is in the world is your relative.

— Grizzly Bear
from

CROW AND WEASEL



Scenic design model by Karen TenEyck. The ridges in the floor are created with Homosote (a paper-and-glue product) and hardware cloth (which is like window screen). The entire stage is then covered with muslin and painted.

Remember: whenever you travel you carry our way of life with you for everyone to see. Listen. Be strong. When you are tempted to give up, think of your relatives. And if you must die, then die well. Remember your people.

— Mountain Lion
from

CROW AND WEASEL



(above, left to right) Costume designs for Mountain Lion, Weasel, and Crow, by Elizabeth Hope Clancy.

Myths, Fables, & Allegories

Thirty-five hundred years before Christ, man started keeping written records of his life and times by carving cuneiform letters on clay tablets. That was the beginning of recorded history. But man had inhabited earth for many thousands of years before he began keeping written records, and it is only in relatively modern times that we have begun to realize the importance of learning all we can about these early people and civilizations. In Barry Lopez's story, he creates a mythic pre-recorded history time in which people and animals and occasionally the natural world speak the same language.

Our knowledge of early man's world, and the plants and animals that shared it, has come to us largely from our interpretation of the treasures—shards of pottery, bones, fossils, tools, cave paintings—unearthed by archeologists. Yet science can only give us a limited view of our ancestors. We would know little of prehistoric cultures without folklore, those tales and myths passed down

through individual tribes from generation to generation.

Folklore comes to us in different forms. Stories that are spiritual in nature are often passed down through the ages in the form of allegory, the symbolic telling of a real story through the use of one that is made up but carries the same meaning (like stories in the *Bible* or the *Koran*). Other lore takes the form of fables, tales not usually based on fact but which serve as moral lessons (like Aesop's *Fables*). Myths may be our richest treasure trove, carrying forward early man's ideas about the creation of the world, the good and bad spirits that shared the earth with him, and the nature of his beliefs. Myths may be fantastic stories of extraordinary people, real or fictitious, who lived long ago, or of events of great importance (like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*).

Sometimes myths were invented to explain baffling natural phenomena, to encourage positive values, or to teach valuable lessons in survival, such as the migrations of food animals or information about farming or weather. It was in this way that tribal history, knowledge, and culture were imparted to the young so that each generation could build on the last and the vast knowledge of the elders was not lost.

Even though allegories, fables, and myths are not necessarily literally true or based in fact, they give us, in broad strokes, an understanding of the world and of the people who created them. In so doing, they also give us a better understanding of our own world. ★

INDIGENOUS

THE INUIT & OTHER NATIVE PEOPLES



Crow and Weasel visit with the Inuit in this book illustration by Tom Pohrt.

It never occurred to Columbus that he would discover a New Land when he set out to prove the world was round by charting a new course to India. When he landed, he thought the natives he met were Indians. Although this was not a familiar word to these Native Americans, they would be so called for hundreds of years, distinguished from India's Indians by use of the term "American Indians."

These mistakenly named "Indians" were North America's indigenous—native—peoples. There were many different Native American tribes, each bearing its own name, such as Dakota, Blackfoot, Sioux, or Mohawk. Because of such factors as the varying climates in which they lived or the wealth or scarcity of food, each tribe had its own traditions, developed over generations to suit the tribe's needs and ensure its survival. The Inuit people, who lived in what is today the state of Alaska, lived primarily as hunters of maritime mammals such as seals, walrus, and whales. Many Inuit were nomadic and followed the trail of the Caribou, while others settled on rivers and depended on fishing for sustenance. (*Eskimo*, like *Indian*, is not a native word. The name, meaning "eaters of raw meat," was conferred upon the Inuit by the Algonquin tribe of what is now eastern Canada.)

During the 1700s world exploration

reached its peak, and European countries vied with each other for sovereign rights to new territories. It was a time of expansion, and monarchs were eager for the natural resources these new lands contained. The fact that these lands were already inhabited was little noted, and indigenous peoples around the world found themselves quickly subdued and often exploited, their rich cultures ignored and left to perish.

It is important to note that this subduing of indigenous peoples does not imply weakness or lack of solidarity so much as a difference in priorities. While Europeans placed importance upon taming the earth to suit their purposes and gathering under their influence as much of the world as they could, most indigenous tribes were more concerned with adapting to the world rather than changing it. Indigenous societies saw themselves as a part of nature, not its conqueror, and lived so as not to destroy the land or drain its resources.

One of the most impressive characteristics of the world's indigenous peoples is their ability to adapt to what were often intolerable conditions. The land the Inuit inhabit is one of the most inclement regions of the world, and the ability to adapt successfully to this cold and harsh environment depends on particular abilities, values, and psychological traits.

Skill in making tools and other devices from all kinds of materials is highly developed among the Inuit; the snow house or *igloo* is an excellent example of indigenous cultural adaptation developed from available natural material.

We have much to learn from earth's ancestors, not only because it enriches our own lives and provides continuity and understanding, but also because this knowledge provides the links that connect ancient man to modern man, past to present, and primitive to civilized. Perhaps the most important benefit of all is the reminder from our forebears of that which we seem to have forgotten: the special relationship which man bears to the Earth and all living things. ★

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