

FROM THE LAND OF SHADOWS: THE MAKING OF GREY OWL. By DONALD B. SMITH. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1990. 320 p., black and white photos, maps, index, bib. Hardbound. Cdn\$24.95.

In the 1930s, British audiences were thrilled by the appearance of a tall, hawk-faced, full-blooded North American Indian who toured their country showing films about the Canadian wilderness and tame beavers he had raised. His name was Grey Owl and he spoke passionately and eloquently about the need for conservation. From the moment he died, Grey Owl's story has become the stuff of legends, for he was not a full-blooded Indian but an Englishman who had been raised by two maiden aunts in a seaside resort in southern England. Within 24 hours of his death at the age of fifty in 1938, the unveiling of the "modern Hiawatha" captured newspaper headlines on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of us grew up knowing the story of Archie Belaney, the young boy obsessed with "Red Indians" who turned himself into Grey Owl with a mission to "interpret the spirit of the wild [and] to interpret Wilderness to Civilization." And oh, how he succeeded! Half a century after his death, Grey Owl's words are as relevant today in the fight to save Ontario's old growth forests and wilderness everywhere as they were when he first penned them.

Every generation will rediscover Grey Owl, and now, thanks to Donald Smith, the story is complete. This is not the first book about the Englishman-turned-Indian. Lovat Dickson, who wrote *Wilderness Man* in 1973, had the advantage of being both Grey Owl's friend and British publisher. But Smith has brought the eye and mind of the historian to the subject and the objectivity that only distance can lend. His book is the fruit of twenty years of research, much of it done among the friends, family and Indians who knew "Archie Grey Owl" from his early days in Canada.

Richly illustrated with historical photographs, the story brings many new psychological insights into *why* Archie Belaney became Grey Owl. We learn about the deeply troubled childhood of a young boy abandoned by both father and mother, growing up sheltered by aunts yet deeply insecure within himself. His passion for Indians, a love of wild creatures, and a need to create a new and different background set Archie Belaney on such a "retreat from reality" that, in Smith's view, the ultimate tragedy was that he never really knew who he was. He became a prisoner of his own fabulous fantasy, for once he had taken on the identity of Grey Owl, he could never reveal who he really was, not even to those closest to him. Lovat Dickson and three of his five wives accepted without question Grey Owl's fable that he had been born in Mexico, the son of a Scots-American plainsman and an Apache Indian woman.

Step by step, Smith takes us through Archie Belaney's life from his early childhood in England to his arrival in Canada in 1917, and to his adoption of Indian ways. His first wife, Angele, was an Indian. But soon after their child was born, Archie abandoned both. What did he know of fatherhood, Smith asks, he who had been abandoned by his own father? The historian, perhaps more than the general reader, will appreciate Smith's sometimes long and detailed chronology of events and dates. But every small detail is important to our understanding of the influences and pressures that led Archie Belaney to become Grey Owl.

By the 1930s, Grey Owl's mask was complete. His fame as a writer, conservationist, and Indian spokesman was growing on two continents. And if real Indians knew he was fake, who were they to unmask a white man who was carrying their cause forward so effectively? Grey Owl's lectures in England held his audiences spellbound, his films "opening their eyes to the value of wilderness and wildlife." Given an audience with the royal family in 1938, he utterly captivated two little princesses with his tales of wild animals.

One marvels at the scope of Archie Belaney's masquerade. There were those who knew the truth about Grey Owl's real identity (the editor of the North Bay *Nugget* for one) but no one "spilled the beans." War was approaching, there was high unemployment and disillusionment everywhere. Smith concludes that Grey Owl's elo-

quence and splendid National Film Board images were elevating the human spirit. Now was not the time to reveal that the hero was an imposter.

We can only guess at the inner tensions of a man forced to lead such a fantastic double life. And this is where Smith's book provides us with its greatest insights. He has drawn all the strands of Grey Owl's life together, describing for us not only the failed marriages and relationships, the bouts with alcohol and mental exhaustion, but also the blossoming of his genius and creativity. And for Smith, the key to that genius lay in Grey Owl's English roots, roots he never fully escaped no matter how well he dyed his hair and skin.

Grey Owl was truly a wilderness man, with a talent — and a chance — to influence a generation. In Donald Smith's words,

. . . he broke away completely from those in the mainstream and gained insights denied to most. Through his books, articles, films and lectures, he opened the eyes of many Canadians to something that they were previously unable to see, or to appreciate. . . . With a vision denied to the four-year politicians of his day, and to the public commentators of the decade, he called on Canadians to conserve their natural resources, which he knew were very limited. The timely nature of his message has kept him in the Canadian consciousness.

Donald Smith's biography of Grey Owl is also timely. His scholarly portrait of a tortured soul whose sense of mission and purpose overcame self-pity and insecurity will continue to keep the message and writings of Grey Owl a vital part of Canadian historiography and of today's environmental movement.

Janet Foster
101-1 Rosedale Road
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4W 2P1

TO THE ARCTIC, AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAR NORTHERN WORLD. By STEVEN B. YOUNG. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1989. 354 p., illus., indices, refs. Hardbound. Cdn\$34.95.

Steven Young, a naturalist-biologist, presents this publication as "an introduction to" and "a field manual on" the circumpolar North. It comes off as a limited success in meeting both of his stated objectives.

When the present reviewer first learned of its forthcoming appearance, I anticipated a volume that could serve as the latest in the long line of general surveys that have been used as basic textbooks in university-level courses with such titles as *Introduction to Northern Studies* or *Geography of the Northlands*. Beginning with Nordenskiöld and Mecking's *The Geography of the Polar Regions*, published by the American Geographical Society of New York (incidentally not Washington, D.C., as cited by Young) in 1928, such books have appeared at rather regular intervals. After the World War II era, during which Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic* was center stage, those who took and taught northern studies survey courses were treated to George Kimble and Dorothy Good's edited classic, *Geography of the Northlands*, published by the A.G.S. (still in New York, not Washington, the home of the *National Geographic Society*). As with Young, Kimble and Good included both the Arctic and Subarctic as their coverage area.

Patrick Baird's *The Polar World*, published by Longman's of London in 1964, encompassed both polar, but not the subpolar, regions. In 1978 *The Circumpolar North* of Armstrong, Rogers and Rowley (Young deleted George Rogers in his references to this work, unfortunately) was published in London by Methuen. Its emphasis was almost entirely on political and economic aspects, as was the stated purpose of the three co-authors. David Sugden contributed *Arctic and Antarctic: A Modern Geographical Synthesis* (Towanda, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982), which restored a balance between