

Grey Owl as necessary myth: A reading of *Pilgrims of the wild*

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Résumé: Dans son oeuvre autobiographique, *Pilgrims of the wild*, Grey Owl développe le mythe de la maturation de l'être en tant qu'artiste créateur.

Saint, sinner, sick! While alive he was worshipped as one of the greatest spokespersons for Canada's Native people and nature.¹ Since his death in 1938, when the Indian Grey Owl was revealed to be Englishman Archibald Stansfeld Belaney, he has been called a fraud, an imposter, and a liar.² And now a new biography portrays him as a pathetic, emotionally-disturbed alcoholic.³ Are any of these assessments just? I would say, no. They are too extreme. They reveal an uneasy relationship with the kind of intuited but nevertheless valuable perceptions that can be revealed through myth.⁴ Furthermore, they reveal a lack of appreciation for the mysterious processes involved in creating outstanding art.⁵

Yes, like that other famous Canadian literary dissembler, Frederick Philip Grove (born Felix Paul Greve in Radomno, Prussia), Grey Owl (born Belaney in Hastings, England) took a new identity in a new land. Yes, like that spectacularly popular American writer, Ernest Hemingway, Grey Owl drank too much and had a number of wives. Yes, Grey Owl seems to have had serious emotional problems. Nevertheless, Grey Owl was also a gifted writer who conveyed an urgent message effectively. The message, that we must conserve our natural resources as the Native people did – "Remember you belong to nature, and it to you"⁶ – was not a mere slogan but a vital prophesy with religious implications. Half a century after Grey Owl's death, we recognize the truth of this only too well.⁷ What's more, the prophesy is contained in at least one literary work of sufficient distinction that it can still profitably be read and taught today, both for the message and the means of expression: myth.

Grey Owl's best and best-known book, the autobiography *Pilgrims of the wild* (1935),⁸ rewards close study with insight into the complexity and skill of its author. Theatrical public image, hidden psychological pressures, storyteller's instincts, and moral indignation can be seen to work together to form an indivisible whole greater than the parts. Exactly how the parts work together is exceedingly difficult to understand much less describe. Still, there can be seen a sort of chain-reaction mechanism wherein acceptance by an authority of the public image (an image which subtly dramatizes otherwise hidden, inexplicable, even forbidden inner tensions and convictions) frees the

artist to tap the deepest wellsprings of his psyche and allows a controlled but vital flow of information to be released, thereby relieving his inner tensions in a constructive way where others (who may or may not have undergone similar experiences) may also benefit.⁹ The skilful use of myth by this outstanding artist universalizes his inner life, allowing many (young and old) to share the insights of one. Difficult, deeply-felt meaning is thereby conveyed effectively with seeming simplicity.

In *Pilgrims of the wild* there are at least four "parts" or levels of meaning, levels which might be called (1) realistic, (2) psychological, (3) romantic, and (4) apocalyptic (the latter two terms borrowed cavalierly from Northrop Frye). The creative "chain-reaction" probably moves in a 1, 2, 3, 4 progression through the parts or levels.

(1) On the realistic level, corresponding perhaps to the narrator's outer or projected self, or public image, Grey Owl explains how he came to be a nature writer and found a beaver sanctuary in a national park. A period of about four years is covered in considerable detail, much of the detail verifiable by other witnesses such as his helpmate, the Iroquois woman "Anahareo." Allusions are also made to earlier periods, such as his fifteen years in Bisco, his war service years, and his childhood; the very few concrete details here are likewise verifiable. The realistic level of the text is its ostensible purpose, an objective report submitted to intelligent adults. At this level, the writer is proving the truth of his message by proving that he is an authority.

(2) On the psychological level, corresponding perhaps to the narrator's unconscious self or id, Grey Owl relives traumatic events that took place when he was about four years old, events that were crucial in forming his identity. No verifiable details about these events are given in the text; for such details one must turn to an outside text such as Lovat Dickson's biography of Grey Owl, *Wilderness man*.¹⁰ The psychological level of the text lends it a sense of emotional urgency: for both the narrator and the reader who identifies with him, the text is cathartic. At this level, the writer is healing himself (the child within).¹¹

(3) On the romantic level, corresponding perhaps to the narrator's conscious self or ego, Grey Owl tells a kind of bed-time story to his own child. The tale is a pleasant, soothing fiction that explains how he himself created the world as the child knows it, making a place for the child in this world and keeping the world safe for the child so that it will grow and flourish. The romantic level of the text, the level of wish fulfillment, gives the text great appeal, drawing the reader into the world created and ultimately reassuring him of its existence in perpetuity. At this level, the writer is healing and guiding (other) children (and the child within other adults). He is also making himself a hero.

(4) On the apocalyptic level, corresponding perhaps to the narrator's will or superego, Grey Owl is writing a funny, new New Testament. He is a bumbling pilgrim-turned-preacher subverting the story of Christ through humour;

the beavers, McGinnis and McGinty, Jelly Roll and Rawhide, are parodies of Christ. The apocalyptic level, like the romantic level, increases the appeal of the text by mocking its author, veiling its seriousness, and by disarming the reader. This level can be interpreted as a joke on the overly strict adults of his childhood,¹² but its ultimate effect is to persuade morally. At this level, the writer is gently admonishing and guiding adults.

All four parts or levels exist in the narrative more or less simultaneously, creating a fugue-like effect. Progress in the narrative is through time to change on all four levels. The measurable time of Grey Owl's life, sandwiched between the mythic times of his ancestors and descendants, is highly stylized, with spring and fall presumably juxtaposed to heighten their symbolic associations (i.e., birth and death, Easter resurrection and Harvest plenitude). Table 1 shows how time and events are manipulated in *Pilgrims of the wild*:

Table 1: Time and events in *Pilgrims of the wild*

Book 1 "Touladi"

Prologue:	PRESENT	
	- Rdg. Mtn. Pk.	- beavers flourishing;
Ch.1:	INFINITE TIME	
	- "North"	- mythic time of ancestors;
	17 YEARS	
	- Bisco	- 15 years; leaves in spring;
		- wanders two years;
	- Abitibi	- marries Anahareo in fall;
		- finds M&M beavers in spring;
Chs. 2-9	ONE YEAR	
	- Touladi	- arrives in fall;
		- writes in winter;
		- loses M&M beavers in spring;

Book 11 "Queen of the Beaver People"

Chs. 10-16	TWO YEARS	
	- Touladi	- gets Jelly Roll in spring;
		- writes in winter;
		- gets Rawhide in spring;
	- Rdg. Mtn. Pk.	- goes to Park in spring;
	PRESENT	
		- family flourishing in fall;
Epilogue	INFINITE TIME	
	- new North	- mythic time of descendants.

Progress through time on the four levels is as follows: (1) on the realistic level, from irresponsible destroyer to responsible conservator of nature; (2) on the psychological level, from unloved child to loved child; (3) on the romantic level, from sterility to fruitfulness; (4) on the apocalyptic level, from birth through death to resurrection.

Now let us look closely at the four levels of meaning.

1. Realistic Level

Like the relic imbedded in the altar of a Catholic Church, imbedded in the Prologue of *Pilgrims of the wild* is the observable, objectively-recorded, verifiable reality of the beaver family, Jelly Roll, Rawhide, and offspring, living at home in the wild, yet in harmony with their human friend, Grey Owl. In the prologue, movie cameras record the beavers coming up from the lake, adding sticks to the earthwork structure in Grey Owl's cabin, begging an apple from "the man," and then returning to their natural habitat (3-6). Nor is this evidence of Frye's "peaceable kingdom"¹³ false, for the author assures us: "It has all been very casual, in a way. No rehearsing has been done, no commands given; the actors have done just about as they like" (6). What's more, the man behind the camera eye ("alert, silent, watchful" [3]) is not from that American tinseltown, Hollywood, but from the staid, Canadian National Parks Service: he is a reliable witness. The filming passage in the Prologue anticipates the book's climax in the penultimate chapter when an official of the National Parks Service, convinced that Grey Owl's tale bears "the stamp of authenticity" (239), oversees the filming of the "first beaver film of any account" (240) and offers him a government position at a "regular salary" to continue his work preserving the beaver (241). Grey Owl begins and ends *Pilgrims of the wild* with evidence of the truth of its message objectively attested to by certified authority.

But throughout the text, wildlife, which also attests to the truth of the message and the authority of its bringer, is described in painstaking detail with consummate skill.¹⁴ On the one hand, for example, his fifteen years among the people of Bisco pass in the book's four opening paragraphs without a specific, identifying detail about a single person, but rather with a few sketchy, subjective, emotion-charged statements about enemies and his reasons for leaving. For example, "Certain hints dropped by the Hudson's Bay Manager, who was also Chief of Police . . . made it seem advisable to cross [the first portage] immediately." On the other hand, in the final five-or-so paragraphs of the first chapter of *Pilgrims*, time slows over a period of three days until finally for a few moments it comes to a standstill as Grey Owl describes, with much specific detail, how the beavers McGinnis and McGinty came to be saved. While the text does contain some elements of fiction (suspense, dialogue), for the most part, it is a careful, objective report of his own actions and those of the wildlife and his wife, Anahareo. Furthermore, he is cognizant of his own biases and emotions, and signals them painstakingly. While he is, for instance, indiffer-

ent toward the beavers, he uses cool, Latin words like *discover* and *female* instead of the warmer Anglo-Saxon *find* and *mother*. As his attitude warms, so does his diction: thus, when the muskrat-like "creature" (cool, Latin) suddenly gives a "low (warm, Anglo Saxon) cry (Latin)" (28), he lowers his gun.

Even when he is fully engaged emotionally with animals, Grey Owl never anthropomorphizes them. For example, by the final paragraph of the first chapter, in Saul-becoming-Paul moments, the beaver kittens have evolved from something that looked like something else (a muskrat), to readily identifiable individuals:

. . . two funny-looking furry creatures with little scaly tails and exaggerated hind feet, that weighed less than half a pound apiece, and that tramped sedately up and down the bottom of the canoe with that steady, persistent, purposeful walk that we were later to know so well. (29)

The adjectives "furry," "little," and "exaggerated" have only the faintest hint of non-objective, emotional overtones. The adjectival "funny-looking" does reflect the author's warm attitude and influences the reader to feel likewise warmly. The adverb "sedately" and adjectives "steady, persistent, purposeful" definitely imply that the animals exhibit some of the most abstract and admirable of human qualities (not always exhibited by humans, of course): dignity, trust and courage. Still, the animals do not wear clothes or speak English. They do nothing that animals do not do. Many witnesses – virtually any dog owner, for example – have testified that animals can be dignified, trusting, and courageous. Thus, while Grey Owl is moved to write about wildlife vividly, he does so without transgressing the bounds of verifiable animal behaviour, without jeopardizing his reputation as a reliable authority on wildlife.

2. Psychological Level

On the psychological level of the text are Grey Owl's deepest motives for pretending to be an Indian and espousing the cause of Native people and nature, as well as his motives for writing the autobiography, *Pilgrims of the wild*.¹⁵ Grey Owl's principal biographers, Lovat Dickson and Donald Smith, together give what appears to be a consistent, reliable account of a deeply-troubled, alcoholic adult trying to come to terms with having been abandoned by his parents at a very young age and raised by aunts and a grandmother in a rather unhappy household. Dickson argues that Grey Owl's mythifying his origins, his making blatantly untrue statements about his parents even while still a child, is sound evidence of "an unusual state of mind."¹⁶ And Smith's evidence supports this argument.¹⁷ I would argue that, at the psychological level, *Pilgrims of the wild* challenges the world of Bisco and replaces it because Grey Owl is challenging his father and replacing him. In this reworking of the Oedipus myth, Grey Owl is now old enough and strong enough to allow himself deep probing of his psyche, a kind of self-directed psychotherapy, to allow

healing.¹⁸ (Dickson tells us he was about thirty-six when he began to live with Anahareo;¹⁹ when he began writing *Pilgrims*, he was already a civil servant with a fixed income, as well as the successful author of magazine articles and *Men of the last frontier*, arguably an expanded version of the Bisco world sketched at the beginning of *Pilgrims*). The healing process involves, according to current psychiatric practice, returning to and reliving the incidents in early childhood that have caused emotional trauma.²⁰ This is what Grey Owl does in *Pilgrims*.

One may suppose that, in childhood, Grey Owl (then, of course, Archie Belaney) refused to see his father as an irresponsible failure, the view held by the women who raised George's boy Archie.²¹ Rather, for the sake of his own sense of self-worth, the boy idealized his father, and when he himself came to chronological manhood he was determined to be just like the friend of Buffalo Bill, the "doughty fighter in the pacification of the West"²²: determined to live the dream. In terms of his biography, as we know it from Dickson and Smith, Grey Owl left England (and his aunts) at eighteen and went to live in Canada. In northern Ontario, he apprenticed himself to trapper Bill Guppy (referred to in *Pilgrims* as "the king of woodsmen" [12]). Then he attached himself to an Ojibway band and took a wife from among the band. Then he abandoned the wife (who had already borne him a child) and struck out on his own in the Biscotasing area.²³ All this took place within about three years, so that he was probably about twenty-one when the Bisco period began. The "North" from which he has come to Bisco in *Pilgrims*, then, represents in terms of Grey Owl's psyche, his private, Oedipal myth, a very particular state of innocence: it is his frozen childhood. During this emotionally-starved period, he has created himself in his own image: the child being father to the man in the sense that, not having been properly parented, the boy had himself to construct an image of the adult person he wanted to be, then trained himself up to be that person – a lonely, exacting task.

In *Pilgrims of the wild*, when Grey Owl leaves Bisco behind, he is leaving behind an inadequate image of manhood: he is disillusioned not only with other men but also, unconsciously at first, with himself and with his artificial manhood-construct. What repels him about the construct is that it is death-producing, not life-producing.²⁴ And all along he has known this unconsciously, for his father's abandoning of him as a child, his father's refusal to stay and nurture him, threatened *him* with death, leaving him to the mercy of the world.²⁵ Psychologically, then, when Grey Owl leaves Bisco and "marries" Anahareo, he is being his wandering father marrying the "Apache" wife. It also means he is being himself as a child again and acquiring a mother. Notice that as soon as they are married, Anahareo begins to refashion Grey Owl. First his dress code, then his eating habits, then his work change under her influence. Then, too, in the course of the autobiography, Grey Owl undergoes a kind of regression-and-regrowth cycle in which initially he becomes less and less sure

of himself, more dependent upon Anahareo and others like David White Stone, and helpless to protect his loved ones (the beavers). However, following the deaths of his first beavers and the desertion by Anahareo, he begins to become more and more sure of himself, more independent, effectively protecting his subsequent beavers, Jelly Roll and Rawhide, writing his first book, obtaining permanent employment, and winning back Anahareo.

At the level of the text in which he is a child and Anahareo is his mother, all the male figures in the text are father figures. Thus the Algonquin, David White Stone, who unwittingly kills the wild beaver with which Grey Owl is planning to found his colony, and who, after McGinnis and McGinty too are lost, goes with Anahareo to find some new wild beaver (Grey Owl, reminiscent of the impotent Jake in *The sun also rises*, is prevented from doing so by a war wound which is acting up), and finally who goes with Anahareo to seek his fortune in the gold mines of northern Ontario, leaving Grey Owl behind to mind the beaver kittens – is also a father figure, seeming progressively benevolent, threatening, then pathetic. Significantly, after Dave and Anahareo leave, while Grey Owl attempts again to found a beaver colony by ensuring the survival of Jelly Roll and Rawhide and writing his first book, as Grey Owl's situation improves, Dave's worsens. Upon Dave's death,²⁶ Anahareo is restored to Grey Owl, Grey Owl's first book is published, and money begins finally to flow into their bank account (251-253): in terms of Grey Owl's private Oedipus myth, he has slain his father and wedded his mother, and this has brought not grief and retribution but joy and reward. The damage done to him psychologically as a child is repaired as he writes about these events in his autobiography.

Paradoxically, to win Anahareo back, Grey Owl must act out a role traditionally regarded as more feminine than masculine: nurturing the young. In babysitting the beavers so that they can miraculously become man and woman from brief childhood,²⁷ Grey Owl is nurturing himself, being the father *and* mother he did not have. Thus, the story of Jelly Roll and Rawhide is also the story of Grey Owl regrowing to manhood under his own care. Grey Owl comes to a more mature concept of manhood close to the concept of "husbandry" in the context of farming: "stewardship" or "conservation" are today's popular words. He is also reshaping his past.

3. Romantic Level

If at the psychological level, Grey Owl is a child telling a story to himself as a child, then at the romantic level, he is an adult father figure telling a story to children. The story – far more interesting, by the way, than *Sajo and her Beaver People*, the story he subsequently wrote, the one of his four books officially catalogued by librarians as a children's book – is an Origin-of-the-world tale which explains to children how things came to be as they are and reassures them of their own rightful place among these things.²⁸ The hero of the tale is, of course, Grey Owl himself, the bumbling and unlikely prince, and his true love is, of

course, Anahareo, the princess. In a slight variation of the classic pattern, the hero marries the girl at the *outset* of the tale; yet they do not live happily, nor are children immediately born to them, for the hero has not proven himself worthy of his true love. To really win the girl, the hero must perform a great deed. There is a dragon to be slain, a huge and fearsome one: commercialism, alias get-rich-quick schemes, alias thoughtless, selfish exploitation of nature for short-term gain. First he must slay the dragon in himself, then in other people. His weapon is the pen.

When, ultimately, the deed has been done and the true love won, the world becomes a pleasant, teeming, loving eternity, and the child of Grey Owl and Anahareo is finally born. Significantly named "Dawn," this child is, presumably, the one (representing all) to whom the tale is addressed. At the romantic level, then, the beavers are fertility symbols. "It is now Fall," begins the final chapter, "the time of Harvest, and the Queen and her little band are busy gathering in supplies against the long Winter, as are the more responsible and useful members of society everywhere" (268). Nature itself has been saved. Following the romance pattern of works like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the *Tempest*, in *Pilgrims of the wild* the hero – both a brave knight errant and a magician-like father figure – ensures that the world which was sterile and infertile, unable to renew itself, is freed from the threat of death and flourishes.

4. Apocalyptic Level

Grey Owl not only reasons with, convinces, and seduces his readers, he frightens them, convincing them that God is on *his* side. To do this, he promotes the beavers to Christ and himself to a *Pilgrim's Progress* Christian, and a biblical Joseph, John the Baptist, and Peter. The way of the wilderness trail becomes, thus, the path of righteousness. As this pilgrim-turned-prophet lays the foundations of the new church-of-the-wild, he reverses the tide of the missionaries, fur traders, gold seekers, and colonizers and leads a conquest of Europe by Canada's Native people and wildlife. (The beaver that roared?) The message of Christ is love, yet representatives of Christendom have wrought the destruction of nature. The message of the Canadians is better love, because the Beaver People are dedicated to preserving nature.

But how can such a message, even if true, be taken seriously? It cannot, unless the audience be disarmed. Disarmament is the function of the book's pervasive funniness, wherein the Christian world is turned upside down. Whereas in *Pilgrim's progress*, John Bunyan evokes sympathy to make the pilgrim, Christian, more human and appealing; in *Pilgrims of the wild*, Grey Owl evokes laughter. Bunyan's hero is pitifully earnest. He is described in the opening paragraphs of *Pilgrim's progress* as "a man clothed in rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden on his back," weeping and trembling in great "distress"²⁹. By contrast,

Grey Owl's hero is arrogant. Not introspective but harshly judgmental, not frail but powerful, an adept canoeist and trapper, a rogue, a loner on the lam from man's law yet a law unto himself condemning those who break nature's laws, this force from the "North" can himself found a new "Frontier." Even the name of the town he leaves behind, "Bisco," rhyming with [San Fran] 'Cisco," – the full name is Biscotasing – gleams with the American Old West machismo that provides the glow to all his perceptions. Phallic is the "light, fast canoe" which, in the opening sentence, he is "driving . . . steadily Northward to the Height of the Land," as the town of Bisco is "dropping fast astern." At the outset of *Pilgrims of the wild*, then, the hero is being set up for a fall: not a tragic fall, but a comic fall, a slip on the banana peel of his male pride.

Cockily, Grey Owl sends "the lady a railroad ticket" (14) and marries her when she appears³⁰. Then start the "complications" (14). Delightful but subversive humour is suddenly introduced as, through the eyes of the new young wife, he begins to see himself as full of "woeful shortcomings" (21). Soon the macho image is being mocked slyly, as Grey Owl is forced to review his ideas of good taste in outer wear: "My idea of looking my best was to wear my hair long, have plenty of fringes on my buckskins . . . and to have the front of my shirt decorated with an oblique row of safety pins on each side" (16). Then the importance of the entire pilgrimage to Touladi, the land of the new "colony" (53) which he is supposed to found, is gently subverted. The first Evangelist, who urges them to try their hand at finding gold in northern Ontario, an Algonquin Indian called David White Stone, is characterized in terms which certainly call into question his qualifications as a spiritual guide: "When in his cups he could sing Mass very passably" (55). The second Evangelist, who points the way to Touladi, a Micmac Indian called "Joe Isaac" (note the "biblical appellation" [58]), is characterized as "by far the most accomplished" of the "numbers of pretty fair liars, artistic and otherwise" whom Grey Owl has met in his "wanderings" (58). The pilgrim himself, Grey Owl, is portrayed during the disastrous, picaresque train trip to Temiscouata Lake in south-eastern Quebec, as a gullible fool: they are already south of the St. Lawrence and heading "more and more South and East" before the "hypnotic effect of Joe Issac's oracular utterances" wears off (64, 65).

In *Pilgrims of the wild*, the pilgrims' crossing of the Bunyan-echoing "Slough of Despond," eight miles of "dreary ruination of stumps and slash" (104), is lightened by the mischievous antics of the beavers: they pull the stove over, hide the dishes, and trample bannock. Then, too, the Indian-style Christmas celebrations that follow Grey Owl's terribly serious, Lear-like walk through the storm where a "feeling of kinship for all the wild" reaches "its culmination" (139), are a parody of the traditional, humble Joseph-and-Mary, babes-and-beasts, Bethlehem scene as well as of the standard family scene on a modern December 24th or 25th. The beavers stand on their hind legs, grab at their presents, eat them, and then pull down the Christmas tree (145, 146).

Grey Owl and Anahareo, at a kind of home-made midnight mass, open a bottle of red wine to celebrate and drink toasts to the wild and tame beavers, the muskrats and other "birds and beasts" whom they have befriended, and "to the good Frenchman who had supplied the wine" (146, 147).

There is nothing funny about the seven poignant paragraphs beginning with a Biblical "And" (162, 163) which record the pilgrims' reaction to the deaths the following spring of McGinnis and McGinty, due to their guardians' negligence. Grey Owl's and Anahareo's grief, and their forlorn hope, humbly echo the emotions felt by Christian as he crosses Bunyan's "River of Death" to the "Celestial City," or even the emotions of sincere churchgoers contemplating the Crucifixion: Grey Owl and Anahareo are truly brought to the "Depths." Yet the resurrection which occurs in the second "Book" is a rather silly affair where the Spirit is one of quite unholy glee. The Beaver that emerges from the tomb is a survivor rather than a saviour, a tough comedienne: "And in the slack water [at the mouth of the creek where McGinnis and McGinty had had their last adventure] Jelly Roll disported herself, made tiny bank dens and queer erections of sticks, what time she was not engaged in galloping up and down the path to the tents" (170). The new life represented by this Jelly Roll who is to become a "screen star, public pet Number One, proprietor of Beaver Lodge, and a personage, moreover, with something to say at the seat of Government in Ottawa" (169), is life of what are commonly called "high" or "animal" spirits.

Thus Grey Owl's evangelizing Beaver People do not take *themselves* too seriously – they have no grandiose delusions. Only their *message* is serious. "Death falls, as at times it must," Grey Owl says in the Epilogue, "and Life springs in its place. Nature lives and journeys on . . ." (281, 282). The creed is an affirmation of life. The message is about rebirth.

And rebirth is what the public, private, and universal myths of Grey Owl are all about. A troubled young man matures into an effective spokesperson for the causes of Native people and nature (realistic level), when he is reborn through a private psychodrama (psychological level). He universalises his personal experience by relating it in terms of the archetypal literary motifs of human biological cycles (romantic level) transcended by a linear, quasi-religious journey of spiritual discovery and regeneration (apocalyptic level). Fact and fiction are welded skillfully into a literary invention – an art that life might do well to imitate (and perhaps Grey Owl himself confusedly tried to do this). Gifted literary writer, Grey Owl, felt that his message needed to be in mythic form to be conveyed effectively. Whether myth or message came first is impossible to determine, but if one accepts that myth can be necessary, then the Amerindian identity "Grey Owl," adopted by the Englishman Belaney, becomes a necessary means to a good end. It is part of a complex creative process. It is a medium, an image, and an artifact. It does not so much conceal as reveal.

NOTES

- 1 See Lovat Dickson, *Wilderness man: the strange story of Grey Owl* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973) 6.
- 2 Among magazine articles about Grey Owl, see T.G. Frayne, "Grey Owl the magnificent fraud," *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 Aug. 1951: 14-15, 36-39; H. Tennant, "Imposter who hoodwinked a king," *Maclean's Magazine*, Jan. 1967: 15; Anon., "Accomplished liars," *Saturday Night*, Oct. 1986: 65, 66. Thomas Raddall's article about Grey Owl in *Footsteps on old floors* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) begins: "He was the most romantic and the most successful imposter of his time."
- 3 Donald B. Smith, *From the land of the shadows: The making of Grey Owl* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1990). Smith quotes several commentators who, when Belaney's true identity was first revealed in 1938, refused to condemn Belaney for this deception (213-214).
- 4 My treatment of myth derives from ideas presented by Prof. Jack Warwick, York University, in a course on Telluric myths in Canadian Literature.
- 5 My concept of creativity is based on courses given by Professor Clara Thomas, York University.
- 6 Quoted by Smith on dustjacket.
- 7 Belaney could be compared to Pope John Paul II, who lost his mother when young, was deeply moved by terrible slaughter (the Holocaust) while a young man, and who has used theatrical devices to convey his message.
- 8 First published Toronto: Macmillan, 1935. All quotations from the paperback edition (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968). Grey Owl's other books were, in chronological order: *Men of the last frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1931); *The adventures of Sajo and her Beaver People* (London: Lovat Dickson Ltd., 1935); *Tales of an empty cabin* (London: Peter Davies, 1936).
- 9 See Rene Welleck and Austin Warren, *Theory of literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956): "To speak of the need for myth, in the case of the imaginative writer, is a sign of his felt need for communion with his society, for a recognized status as artist functioning within society" (192).
- 10 Smith's biography may be treated only as an appendix to Dickson's.
- 11 A similar psychological process seems to have taken place with two English Canadians who adopted Amerindian ways and wrote autobiographical works describing this: Emily Carr (born 1871) and Evelyn Eaton (born 1902). Carr's eight autobiographical works were written between 1927 and 1941, Eaton's four between 1968 and 1980. Unlike Carr and Eaton, however, Grey Owl does not *consciously* confront the aspects of his background which provide the deepest motivation for adult behaviour.
- 12 Smith says the aunt who raised Belaney "stressed obedience and excellence, just as she did with the collie dogs she bred" (13). Dickson gives a more modulated insightful account: "Ada dominated his life. She became both mother and father to him, and he never knew whether he feared or loved her. . . . He responded so intelligently . . . that she perhaps pressed him a little too hard" (30).
- 13 Northrop Frye, "Conclusion" to *Literary history of Canada* in *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971) 249-50.
- 14 Pilgrims of the wild supports Lovat Dickson's comment in "Archibald Stansfeld Belaney" in the *Oxford companion to Canadian literature*, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983) that Grey Owl was above all "an unsurpassed observer of animal behaviour and recorder of wilderness life."
- 15 See Roy Pascal, *Design and truth in autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960) 5: "From the autobiography . . . we expect a coherent shaping of the past."

- 16 Dickson, *Wilderness* 23.
- 17 Smith's many facts are well-documented, but his analysis of Grey Owl's psyche is oversimplified.
- 18 See Footnote 11.
- 19 Dickson, *Wilderness*, 128.
- 20 See *Harvard guide to modern psychiatry* (Harvard University Press, 1978) 272: basic to present "psychodynamic thinking" is "the belief that the most crucial etiological forces are those that operate in childhood." Regression "emerges as part of the therapeutic process" (361). Professor Mary Jeffrey Collier, who has taught developmental psychology and psychoanalysis at the Universities of Indiana, Louisiana State, and Minnesota, cautions against focusing on one single trauma. "In dreams, animals often represent children," and in general animals and nature represent a "tremendous resource for restoration of equilibrium. . . . An artist will reshape [a family past] in an aesthetically pleasing manner." (Interview, June 1990).
- 21 "Ada and Carrie [Grey Owl's aunts] loathed George, who had swallowed up almost all the family fortune with his public school education, failed in business, African big game expedition, land investments in Florida, and his drinking" (Smith 12).
- 22 Dickson 23
- 23 Dickson, chs. 4, 5. Smith, ch. 4. Both Dickson and Smith effectively dispute Raddall's claim in *Footsteps on old floors* that Grey Owl spent his first years in Canada among Maritime Micmacs.
- 24 *Men of the last frontier* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1931; all subsequent quotations from the Laurentian Library edition, 1976), describes the Bisco civilization as a glorified men's club where the rites of initiation are the exigencies of the trail. Prowess, endurance, instinct and cunning appear required to attain the treasure. "Man" here is a metonym for a boy's romantic idea of manhood, as first minted into classic children's literature by Robert Louis Stevenson in *Treasure Island*. See Smith, pp. 17, 18, for a discussion of Grey Owl's childhood reading, which may also have included Canadian Ernest Thompson Seton's *Two little savages*.
- 25 In fact he was forced to leave Bisco because public feeling and law condemned him for getting pregnant and then abandoning yet another Indian girl, who died shortly after giving birth to a son (Dickson 98), and for "some rifle-shooting exploits and knife-throwing at human targets" (97). Irresponsibility and outbursts of irrational, barely-controlled anger might indicate that he was acting out his past anger toward his father. Perhaps in leaving Canada at this stage and enlisting for the war in Europe, Grey Owl was attempting to return home and begin again as his father had done. His unsuccessful marriage, following his discharge from the army, to an English woman approved by his aunts, was an act of bigamy, "curiously repeating . . . his father's action with his first marriage [to Grey Owl's mother's older sister]" (Dickson 103). On returning to Canada, he staged a reunion with his first wife, the Ojibway woman, whom he again made pregnant; he abandoned her and returned to Bisco working as an ill-behaved fire ranger and trapper (105-7, 120). Around 1925 he met Anahareo, and left Bisco for good shortly thereafter [Dickson, 110-127].
- 26 Smith says that in fact David White Stone outlived Grey Owl by thirty years (117).
- 27 McGinnis and McGinty are brother and sister portrayed as child-like: Jelly Roll, by contrast is "Queen of the Beaver People," a potential mother and even - while still young - a distinctly adult companion to Grey Owl. Her kittenhood passes virtually without comment; she becomes a seductive adolescent, "beautiful . . . always bright and very much alive, [with] a rich, full-furred coat, dark and glistening, (182).
28. See Elizabeth Cook, *The ordinary & the fabulous* (2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 1: "myths are about the creation of all things, the origin of evil, and the salvation of man's soul; legends and sagas are about the doings of kings

- and peoples in the period before records were kept; fairy tales, folk tales and fables are about human behaviour in a world of magic, and often become incorporated in legends." Grey Owl's tale exhibits characteristics of myths, legends, and fairy tales.
- 29 John Bunyan, *The pilgrim's progress* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975), 42.
- 30 *Pilgrims of the wild* can be read as stages in an inner journey: soul is in darkness (before he meets Anahareo, his anima); soul finds a mirror of itself (he marries Anahareo); soul rejoices (first Christmas with Anahareo and McGinnis and McGinty); soul despairs (McGinnis and McGinty are presumed dead); soul is in bondage (Anahareo is away, working in the mine for wages); and finally soul is freed (Grey Owl and Anahareo are reunited).

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