

all recognition by external interference, perhaps quite literally gone forever. Even 'as late as 1928 [Strong claimed] the native basis of life had not yet been superseded,' although he also realised that 'this state of affairs, sad to say, is passing rapidly' (page 1).

With the passing of time, Strong's journal has gained significance as an important ethnographic and cultural document, and it has been greatly augmented by the editorial work of Leacock and Rothschild. *Labrador winter* is well served by Strong's original photographs, maps, appendices, a bibliographic essay by Stephen Loring, a cumulative bibliography, and an index. For the most part Leacock and Rothschild have executed their task with considerable skill. Nevertheless, there are still the usual odd errors of proof-reading (pages 5, 8, 74, 97, for example) and some passages that seem unnecessarily repetitious of earlier material. For example, page 103 repeats material found on page 98, and the same is true of pages 109 and 107 (here the quoted word 'door' is a moveable feast), and pages 121 and 107.

It remains strange to think that a man possessed of such gritty determination, who braved sub-zero temperatures, great personal discomfort, and the deprivation of his own kind for so long, never published the contents of his journal. 'I could go back now [he writes], it probably...might be safer, but the work is only half done and this is the only way to finish it. As long as I've started on this God-forsaken job I might as well see it through' (page 134). Perhaps Strong felt that the personal element of his work was inimical to ethnographic studies of his time. If so, it is a curiously perverse quirk of fate that his empathy for the Naskapi way of life is precisely what makes his work so valuable to us now that it has almost gone. As Jack London, a fellow wanderer in sub-Arctic territories, once commented, this is 'part of the mystery of things that passes understanding,' but then humankind in general has an alarming tendency to value indigenous inhabitants and their environments only when it has almost destroyed them, and sometimes not even then. (Ian N. Higginson, Centre for History & Cultural Studies of Science, Rutherford College, The University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NX.)

MISS SMILLA'S FEELING FOR SNOW. 1994. Peter Høeg. London: HarperCollins. 410 p, soft cover. ISBN 0-00-654783-4. £5.99.

Greenland has finally appeared on the world literary map with Peter Høeg's novel *Miss Smilla's feeling for snow*. *Time Magazine* hailed it as the 'Book of the Year,' and, indeed, it has become an international best-seller, winning accolades from critics and readers alike. If anything, its success has been too great; in fact, one lone reviewer

across the Atlantic criticised it for being too perfect! How can it be, then, that this novel that focuses upon a Greenlandic spinster, approaching middle-age, living a lonely life in Copenhagen in a form of exile from Greenland both spiritually and geographically, has won such keen attention?

The answer must surely lie on the various levels on which the novel can be read; it is, in the first instance, the story of grim Smilla, whose very name, associated in Danish with the word for smiling, provides an initial element of humorous irony, a characteristic of the book cleverly woven into its entire fabric. She struggles with enormous fortitude to battle her way through a life in which she is truly at home nowhere, unable, really, to come to terms with her roots. The novel is politically correct, but naturally so, and not in a way that is forced or repelling. Smilla presents herself to the reader in the first person in self-consciously unloveable terms, and yet one cannot help being attracted to her: her truthfulness, her determination, and her commitment to things that matter to her.

In the second instance, the novel is a mystery, in a manner reminiscent of Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose*. Smilla, her unrequited maternal instincts awakened, against herself, by a Greenlandic boy more or less abandoned by his mother, devotes her energies to unravelling the mystery of how he came to be murdered one winter's night in Copenhagen. It is the snow that contains the answer to this riddle, and Smilla's fight against an establishment cover-up leads her back to Greenland and an heroic expedition into the unknown.

I asked the author, who had spent some time living in Greenland, if the experiences and perceptions he wrote about had come from an intimate understanding of Greenlandic people. No, he replied, his intimate knowledge is more of Africa, since he is married to an African. Perhaps it is therein that the secret of this book lies, for the author has tapped a vein of universal moral issues and yearnings, relevant to readers whatever their culture or background. (Neil Kent, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

Publications Received

BARRETT WILLOUGHBY: ALASKA'S FORGOTTEN LADY. 1994. Nancy Warren Ferrell. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press. x + 188 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-912006-76-5. US\$14.95.

FROST BYTES. 1995. Pene Greet and Gina Price. Neutral Bay, New South Wales: Transworld Publishers. x + 269 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-86824-554-2. Aus\$22.95.