Elise Aylen and The Night of the Lord

Helen Tiffin

Abstract

Elise Aylen was the second wife of renowned Canadian poet Duncan Campbell Scott. After his death she left Canada for India and spent the rest of her life there.

She first travelled to pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and then throughout India, settling with her guru first in the north of India and later in the south near Coroor where she died in the early 1970s. During her lifetime Aylen published many poems and a play; but she also wrote a number of novels (set in medieval Europe) which remained unpublished at her death and are now housed in Canada’s National Archives.

One remarkable work—entitled *The Night of the Lord*—was published in her lifetime. Adapted in part from a journal she wrote during her early pilgrimages, *The Night of the Lord* was published by a religious press in India and interweaves three narratives of journeys: her own; a classical Indian tale; and the journey of a young boy in search of his lord through India in medieval times. Aylen uses this structure to “place” herself in India; as a narrative strategy of identification with her adopted home. This paper will examine the ways in which Aylen uses her own journal and the other two journeys to achieve this end.