

Allison Mitcham

*THE NORTHERN IMAGINATION*

Moonbeam: Penumbra Press, 1983. Pp. 103.

Reviewed by Theresia Quigley

In the "Introduction" of her most recently published study of Canadian fiction, *The Northern Imagination*, Allison Mitcham suggests that "the Canadian imagination in many of its most original flights is inspired by the North" (p. 9). However, whereas English-Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, and Harold Horwood have only fairly recently begun to use the Canadian northland as a fictional theme, the northern awareness, Mitcham states, has long been an important part of the French-Canadian literary myth as a route of escape towards personal freedom and self-realization.

The two main French-Canadian writers discussed in some detail in this study are Gabrielle Roy and Yves Thériault. Students of Mitcham's work are familiar with her views on Gabrielle Roy and will readily acknowledge her to be one of Canada's outstanding scholars in this regard (see her *The Literary Achievement of Gabrielle Roy* [Fredericton: York Press, 1983]). It is therefore her study of Thériault's work which will possibly be of greater interest to the reader of this particular study. Aspects of his fiction are compared to such English-Canadian writers as Harold Horwood, Fred Bodsworth, Grey Owl, and Farley Mowat; however, according to Mitcham, Thériault's work is particularly influenced by the philosophy of Henry David Thoreau. For him, as for Thoreau, North America's first inhabitants are of primary interest. He believes them to have preserved valuable secrets passed down from their ancestors, and feels that much can be learned from them about life and survival. Thériault's concept of love, as discussed here, with special references to D. H. Lawrence, Margaret Fuller, and George Gissing, reveals a fresh and interesting view of his fiction which may not have been explored sufficiently in the past.

Violence as a dominant theme in Canadian fiction is explored in a chapter intitled "The Violence of Isolation." André Langevin's *Le temps des hommes* figures prominently in this study as do Marie-Claire Blais's *La Belle bête* and Anne Hébert's *Le Torrent*. Among English-Canadian writers, Mitcham singles out Frederick Philip Grove as the first whose fiction, to a large extent, is based on his views of northern living. She compares Grove's conception of the positive aspects of northern life to the views expressed by Rainer Maria Rilke; however, she does not fail to point out that Grove was clearly "aware of both northern dream and northern nightmare" (p. 65). Other English-Canadian writers discussed are Hugh MacLennan, Sinclair Ross, Henry Kreisel, and, particularly, Margaret Atwood, whose female protagonist in *Surfacing* is, according to Mitcham, "the first woman character in contemporary Canadian fiction to precipitate a northern venture and to hold the reins of the undertaking" (p. 95). Though Mitcham's book is by no means voluminous, the author does manage to cover a vast amount of literary material in this thought provoking comparative study of Canadian northern fiction. As always, Mitcham writes lucid, uncluttered prose; her ability as a scholar and as a teacher of literature is clearly evident in this work.

Elena J. Kalinnikova

*INDIAN-ENGLISH LITERATURE: A PERSPECTIVE*

Atlantic Highlands, N.J.; Humanities Press, 1982. Pp. 232.

Original Russian edition: Moscow: NAUKA, 1974.

Reviewed by S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal

Elena J. Kalinnikova's *Indian-English Literature: A Perspective* is the first book of history of Indian-English literature written by a Russian scholar. Critics outside India have written on individual Indian-English writers and their works, but few outsiders have attempted a full-scale history and presented a synoptic view of the whole of this new literature of India. Cut