

proach them from different angles or from different perspectives. This is the point Heble tries to impress on us in *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*. Heble presents us with a thorough reading of Munro's stories and a theoretical and systematic investigation of "paradigmatic discourse." His work may well be a practical application of linguistic theories to criticism of literature.

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WORK CITED

Richards, Jack, John Platt, and Heidi Weber, eds. *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. Essex: Longman, 1985.



Adam Shoemaker, ed. *Oodgeroo: A Tribute*. St. Lucia, Queensland: U of Queensland P, 1994. Pp. xv, 190. \$14.95.

I first met Oodgeroo when she was still Kath Walker, in 1981, at her home on Minjerriba, better known as North Stradbroke Island, off the east coast of Australia, near Brisbane. I saw her again a few years later, at a conference in Canada, where she was a visiting writer. I had encountered the local educator, who welcomed thousands of people of all ages and all cultures to her "sitting-down place," where they might get at least some sense of what being Aboriginal means. I had also observed the international star of Aboriginal writing. Like most others, however, I had glimpsed only a very small part of her value in the world.

The editor of the present volume, Adam Shoemaker, knows many more. It intrigues Australians that it should be a Canadian who has done more than any other academic to make Australians aware of Aboriginal writing, whether in his survey study, *Black Words, White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988* or in the anthology *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writing*, which he edited with Jack Davis, Mudrooroo Narogin, and Stephen Muecke. The latter grouping shows the uneasy associations which define the field. Davis is an Aboriginal activist but also a poet and playwright of the old school, who sees writing as writing. Mudrooroo is at once academic, theorist, writer, and activist. Muecke is a left-wing scholar whose work is laden with Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari.

Oodgeroo: A Tribute reflects such ambivalences. It begins with the usual introduction, in which Shoemaker places himself, Oodgeroo, and the other contributions in context. It then proceeds to groupings titled "Reminiscence, Record, Travel," "Poetry," and "Voices: Educationist, Activist, Performer." The first section is for me the most successful, particularly a piece by her sister, Lucy Pettit. It is not that she says anything unusually novel but the gentle childhood depicted—troubles with a snake, fishing with the family—gives a sense of

the idyll the adult Oodgeroo remembered. Different but similar is John Collins's "A Mate in Publishing," a straightforward account of Oodgeroo's early work and its and her position in the struggle for progressive writing and publishing in Australia. There are also some memoirs in the other sections, such as one by the Federal Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, a suggestion of Oodgeroo's importance. In "Oodgeroo: A Pioneer in Aboriginal Education," her achievements in that field are described by someone who was with her for many of them, Alan Duncan.

But the majority of reminiscences are in the opening of the book. Philip McLaren and Roberta Sykes give their personal takes on Oodgeroo's assistance to them as black Australian writers. Ulli Beier and Nicholas Jose do the same for the international writing community. While Sykes gives some nice glimpses of the depth of Oodgeroo's care for others and Jose of Oodgeroo's political quandary on a trip to China, neither goes beyond the obvious.

This might seem strange given the usual accomplishments of a writer such as Sykes. She has often been attacked as "extreme" or even "strident" but "bland" is not a word often applied to her. Yet it is an accurate adjective for much of the book. In "Poetry," most of the participants are caught in the old argument "Is it poetry or is it propaganda?" I have no idea when the debate first arose, maybe in response to Plato, but it was dull then and it is dull now. As the "realist" writers with whom Oodgeroo was associated in her early days would attest, writing to change the world requires different rules. The old saws of the New Critics, such as "poetry is paradox," cannot apply.

Mudrooroo attempts to raise this above the reductive by coining a new term, "poetemic," but it is difficult to see how this helps. On the other hand, Mudrooroo's claim that "I don't know one Aboriginal poet" seems decidedly unhelpful. Mudrooroo explains this by defining as poets only "those who declare themselves poets first and foremost" and by asserting that these reflect "a nineteenth-century ideology of romanticism." Of course, almost no one would accept such a definition but even if one did what would happen to such figures as Byron and Shelley? Both would call themselves poets but for them the word meant something like "earth-shaking political activist."

This volume is a reprint of one issue of *Australian Literary Studies*, but it is not up to the journal's usual standards. I suspect the reason for this is wrapped up in that title, "a tribute." All the contributors were so concerned to support Oodgeroo they neglected to find a driving force in their own writing. It is true that many reviewers, especially early ones, viewed Oodgeroo's verse as too political to be good poetry. This does not mean, however, that an attack on this argument is the best scholarly contribution one could make to Oodgeroo's work. The most interesting interpretive venture in this collection is Shoemaker's conclusion. He takes Oodgeroo's narration for the Rain-

bow Serpent exhibit at Expo 88 and considers it in context in a way which has not been done before and which added to my understanding of Oodgeroo's work. I wish I could say the same of more of the book but I cannot.

There is no Canadian equivalent to Oodgeroo. Perhaps such an equivalent could be achieved by a combination of Pauline Johnson, Kahn Tineta Horn, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Lee Maracle, and Chief Dan George. Given that I doubt those five people could even discuss *The Rez Sisters* with any hope of agreement, this suggests the complicated and perhaps conflicting achievements of Oodgeroo. There is no question she deserves a tribute. It is too bad the academic system has not succeeded with this one but perhaps the book's very existence will lead to other studies which can begin to comprehend her contributions.

TERRY GOLDIE



Mary Beatina, OSM. *Narayan: A Study in Transcendence*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993. Studies of World Literature in English. Vol. 3. Pp. xii, 154. \$41.95.

Of all of the Indian English writers, it is probably R. K. Narayan who has attracted the most attention from literary critics, Indian and non-Indian. Various aspects of his art have been analyzed: his language and style, his theme and technique, his audience, his depiction of India in terms of tradition versus modernity and of the East-West encounter, his achievement as a short-story writer, his translations, and his non-fiction. Beatina takes up the question of the interaction between the mundane and the transcendent in four of Narayan's novels: *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The English Teacher* (1945), and *The Guide* (1958). The protagonist's transcendence of narrow, mundane bonds is always an ongoing process. The transcendent in Narayan, according to Beatina,

implies not necessarily any visionary experience or *nirvana*, but a getting beyond the expected, a spiritual discovery. . . . This step into another world always involves a spiritual experience—the kind of experience that would normally be called “transcendent,” and yet the experience that follows the transcendent experience often seems more genuinely spiritual than the conventionally religious or conventionally “other worldly” experience itself. This richer and wider form of transcendence occurs when the character brings the transcendent experience to bear upon the mundane world. (2)

Beatina begins with a brief introduction to Indian literature (3-5) and to Narayan's place in Indian writing in English (6-13), and with a survey of extant criticism (14-15). The second chapter, “Naive Transcendence,” is devoted to Narayan's first two novels, *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*, in which Swami, the child in the former, grows