

the Anglo-Catholic Church, separated from his first wife Vivienne, and established his career as an internationally renowned lecturer and, in today's terminology, public intellectual. We can be grateful for Ronald Schuchard's impressive accomplishment, and we can hope that it proves the model for the massive editorial work that still awaits the largest part of Eliot's work.

MICHAEL COYLE



Ajay Heble. *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994. Pp. x, 210. \$35.00.

Alice Munro is one of those famous Canadian writers who occupy a solid position in Canadian literature and have a strong appeal to readers and critics around the world. To most readers, Munro's stories are enjoyable, but there are elements in them that are so subtle and implicit that there seems to be a barrier to comprehension. To most critics, her works embody quite different tendencies that require commentary and explication. Most scholarly criticism seems to be focused on Munro's involvement in realism or in feminism, or on aspects of theme, style, genre, or technique. Her stories, however, involve much more than what has been explored to date.

In *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*, Ajay Heble looks at all the published stories of Munro and discusses "paradigmatic discourse" chronologically yet systematically. Heble applies a linguistic approach to his work and defines "paradigmatic discourse" as "a reminder of the unresolvable gap between all writing and the reality which that writing attempts to re-present." "Paradigmatic discourse" here is not used in its usual meaning but to "describe a domain of language use in which the meaning of an item depends on the difference between it and other items which might have filled the same slot in a given sequence" (5). It conforms to the realm of pragmatics, which is defined as the "study of use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used" (*Applied Linguistics* 225). Pragmatics studies the meaning of a discourse conveyed in certain contexts rather than the literary meaning; put another way, it considers the implication that is apparently absent in the level of literary meaning. Heble leaps over the literary meaning to the absent meaning, or to the uncertain implication suggested in Munro's fictions. His work may extend the scope of scholarly criticism of Munro and mark the advent of a kind of sophisticated and linguistic study that is required for examining the complexity of Munro's works.

Heble begins in Chapter One with "suggestions of absent or potential relationships that violate presuppositions we may have of the world around us" (19). In the following six chapters, he goes on to argue

that a certain level of meaning in a discourse sometimes is absent, or potential, or implicit, or uncertain, or surprising, or deferred, and with each level of meaning we may change our assumption or comprehension of the reality. He states that our comprehension of a discourse is not independent of the absent or potential meaning that might be ignored at first glance.

Heble's work is informative and persuasive. He provides many exemplary or illustrative cases and minute details to support his argument. He is alert to the ambiguity or uncertainty of meaning in a seemingly simple question, as in the suggestion of a father to his daughter in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" (in *Dance of the Happy Shades*):

"After supper my father says, 'Want to go down and see if the Lake's still there?'" . . . By beginning the story . . . with this peculiar lack of assertion, Munro is already questioning the assumption that reality is stable and fixed. . . . In presenting us with this first sentence, posed as an indirect question asked by the father, Munro prepares the reader for the possibility that the worlds we encounter in her fiction may be more slippery than they might at first appear. The hypothetical position hinted at in the father's initial question—the possibility that the lake *might not* be there—reveals Munro's own interest in what I am calling paradigmatic discourse. In the first sentence Munro's fascination with absent or potential level of meaning is already apparent. (20)

Heble does not take for granted the frequent use of the word "would" in the story "Simon's Luck" (in *Who Do You Think You Are?*) and he leads us to examine further the importance of absent meaning in a discourse:

Rose waits for Simon to return. . . . When he fails to show up, Rose occupies herself by speculating on what will happen over the next few days:

These would be enough, at some point, to make her decide that he must have taken ill, he would never have deserted her otherwise. She would phone the Kingston Hospital, ask about his condition, be told that he was not a patient. After that would come the day she went into the college library, picked up back copies of the Kingston paper, searched the obituaries to discover if he had by any chance dropped dead. . . . (115)

Rose fails to find out the reason Simon does not show up; Heble suggests that

[r]ecurrent use in this passage of the conditional "would" reminds us that Rose's mode of thought here is marked by a fundamental uncertainty. Her way of coping with Simon's failure . . . is to play out alternative situations, to construct imaginary correlations, to create, in short, a hypothetical model for what *might* be the case. . . . Rose's problem, at the time of her speculations, is her failure to make this connection, her failure to acknowledge the importance of these absent and potential levels of meaning. (115-16)

"We cannot take everything we read for granted" (168), writes Heble, and there might always be some alternate interpretation of Munro's stories, and of any piece of literary work, for we might ap-

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