

Works Cited

Toner, Patrick. *If I could turn and meet myself: The Life of Alden Nowlan*. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 2000.

Alice G. den Otter, ed. *Relocating Praise: Literary Modalities and Rhetorical Contexts*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000. 184. \$19.95 paper.

Composed of eleven essays on a variety of texts, periods, and issues, the rich diversity of this collection may seem to limit its usefulness to scholarship in any one area. But the purpose of the collection is less to inform than to transform, less to provide tools than to offer alternatives. The product of a conference on the "Literary Modalities of Praise" at Lakehead University (1998), the book remains true to the original project of "asking how praise could modulate, deconstruct, and recreate our pleasure in reading and writing literary texts" (2). The essays demonstrate that praise, and attention to the practice or representation of praise, can be revelatory, discerning, and generative; the collection as a whole, due to den Otter's editorial contribution, urges an intellectual generosity and receptiveness lacking in the critical environment today. The book, in other words, is an *apologia* for praise.

Den Otter sets the trajectory with her introduction. Using as a unifying device "Call for Papers: An Apology," a poem written by Rick Watson in response to the original call for conference papers, she continually suggests the non-discursive, transformative power of praise: "praise requires and yields an openness (14)." As the papers unfold, "praise continuously shifts locations, imaginatively beginning anew without starting over.... In the words of the Praise Singer [Rick Watson], 'never doubt that something else, somewhere else / will make the praise your tongue cannot complete'" (14). She maintains this emphasis by placing the essays most congruent with her *apologia* first and last, and by naming each of three subsections with a derivative of the word "location," sometimes at the risk appearing precious.

The first two papers in "Allocations: The Practice of Praise" uncover the noetic power of epideictic rhetoric. In "The Temporality of Praise," Karmen MacKendrick exuberantly engages the works of St Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Rainer Maria Rilke to explicate the "epistemological" (20), even mystical function of praise: non-linear and non-discursive, praise does not inform or narrate, does not deliber-

ate or persuade (20). Rather, by “intensifying” the moment, it enables us to participate in the eternal now (25–27). J. Douglas Kneale sustains the level of vibrant, nuanced discussion in “Coleridge and Epideictic.” Stressing the meaning of *epideixis* as “the language of show or demonstration” (34), Kneale examines the oscillations between light and dark, stasis and motion, presence and absence, octave and sestet in Coleridge’s “Effusion xviii” (later retitled “To the Autumnal Moon”), to show that the “effusive, even proto-Spasmodic rhetoric” of Coleridge’s youthful poetry, manifested in apostrophes and exclamations (33), actually reveals Coleridge’s awareness of the “hermeneutic leap” involved in the “invention” of “meaning” (44–5). Joan Dolphin and Sandra Sabatini continue to explore the positive function of praise but shift the focus to the social arena. Dolphin finds that identification with Shakespeare empowers the protagonist in Kate Grenville’s *Lillian’s Story*; Sabatini, employing the socio-linguistic theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, finds in the letters of Margaret Laurence a strategy of praising “to make connections” and create “community” among “Canadian writers” (63).

The papers gathered under the subtitle “Dislocations: The Price of Praise” balance the collection, investigating the darker side of praise. Nicole E. Didicher and Ken Paradis each discuss the self-serving epideictic rhetoric of Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe’s *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and Philip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*, respectively, both of whom twist praise and blame according their own needs and anxieties. Kathleen McConnell illumines the “different social functions” and cost of the “mutual praise” between Felicia Hemans and William Wordsworth (87). Kim Fedderson and J. Michael Richardson critique Ian McKellen’s film *Richard III* and Al Pacino’s *Looking for Richard* in terms of the “epideictic dilemma” faced by those who would bring Shakespeare to the screen—that is, the need to strike a balance between obedience to “tradition” and “self-regarding” innovation (119).

The final three essays, appearing under the subtitle “Relocations: the Place of Praise,” each advocate a role for praise in the academy, making explicit the rhetorical thrust of the collection. Constance Rooke, the keynote speaker at the conference, suggests that “in our infatuation with theory, we have lost a crucial kind of openness to the other which is the literary text” (134), and, therefore, the benefits of connectedness and self-understanding that should come with literary study. JoAnn McCaig, on the other hand, enlists the authority of Bourdieu himself to argue that the proper use of theory actually “intensifies the literary experience” and offers a truer appreciation of “the highest achievements of the human enterprise”

(150, quoting Bourdieu). The last essay, Erika Scheurer's "Notes Towards a Theory of Constructive Praise," challenges the purely critical model of pedagogy. Proposing Chris Anson's model of the "reflective responder" in place of the "dualist" who adheres to the right/wrong binary (159), Scheurer suggests that we approach student papers with a more readerly "attitude," an attitude "more curious and accommodating, less eager to find fault" (160–61).

As refreshing as this collection is for its own openness and curiosity, it suffers from a lack of rigour that perhaps necessarily attends its strengths. The categories suggested by the subtitle of the book, "Literary Modalities and Rhetorical Contexts," are nowhere explained or helpfully employed, and analyses of fictional texts and non-fictional social exchanges remain undifferentiated. The relationships among imitation, identification, and praise, on which several papers depend for their relevance to the project (for instance, Dolphin, Sabatini, and Fedderson and Richardson), is assumed but very little examined. Den Otter only briefly asserts, by way of William Blake's aphorism, "Praise is the Practice of Art," that "to copy attentively the creation of another is to affirm it, to praise it, perhaps even to enhance it" (6). Readers coming from the rhetorical tradition may be surprised by the absence of Burke from this collection, given the frequent appearance of the term "identification."

Finally, I found the writers most eloquent and persuasive when engaged in careful criticism, and least so when they attempted overt epideictic rhetoric themselves. But the contributors might welcome this observation as further evidence that praise appears in surprising "places," that careful attention to the creation of another *is* praise, and that praise does not threaten critical thought.

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