

Monday, February 08, 2010

Barry McKinnon, In the Millennium rob mclennan

the world
a contradiction of attempts at connection to it /

I crave loneliness as its opposite (“In the Millennium”)

[Prince George poet Barry McKinnon](#) has always been a poet working through and around the essences of what is essential, and essentially human, while somehow managing to still evade, and pretend he isn’t at the same time. [If his previous books wrote “the centre,” writing \(with gentle irony\) his geography of Prince George, British Columbia, his *in the millennium*](#) (Vancouver BC: New Star, 2009), his first trade poetry collection of the new decade/century (his [The Centre: selected poems 1970-2000](#) that appeared in 2000 belongs in the *previous*, don’t kid yourself), McKinnon manages a series of concentric rings moving from that same central point, and back again. Originally composed as a ten-part manuscript of “in the millennium,” McKinnon has produced a collection of some thirteen sequences—including “Bastard File,” a section of shorter, wayward, even, pieces—with titles such as “Sex at 52,” “It Can’t Be Said,” “Bolivia/Peru,” “In the Millennium” and “Prince George (Part One).” McKinnon has always been one of those poets writing a continuous piece his entire career, with each new long poem/sequence fitting in with all that has come before, much like the [American poets Kate Greenstreet](#) and [Fanny Howe](#), and [Canadian poets bpNichol, Fred Wah](#) and [Robert Kroetsch](#).

desperate predation & no sense of *what*
they could ever care

: the city as body – began, arked, disintegrated, garbage strewn,
lumps of clothes / single shoes / bags of needles / thrift store
moved or bankrupt though the goods they sold were free

to my right, natives clumped, stoned and grinning, once
dispossessed, to be dispossessed again / not mingling, but
clumped by the abandoned Food Teller doorway / wait for crack,
booze and heroin

what it is, *is*. cruel that body and mind sense their own demise.
the city is organ. it sees itself. disintegrated. its body and mind
its own demise

turning left, sense *nothings left*. “closed / staff shortage”

give shake of head,

fucked / without a voice. (“Prince George Core”)

McKinnon, over the years, has worked his core, his poetic exploration of the north, his north, the centre, moving slowly out; writing an exploration of his immediate, including Prince George, his wife, rare travel, ageing, friends, loss and conversation, as well as the ongoing “sex at” series started with [Brian Fawcett](#) in the late 1970s as “Sex at Thirty-One,” continuing here with its usual regularly of ever seven years. Just what has McKinnon learned throughout those intervening years? this embrace gives the momentary world the edge you think is paradise, and our ruin becomes its meaning

and welds us silver in a ring of virtue and trust
unerring faith, given at last our sense of a last
divinational pause

at 52 it was a multiple – might as well say an angel’s voice

to pull my winged heart to the wells of thought: disappear to
come alive. to be nothing

reveals

everything you forgot. & thus at 52, a kind of recognition
immediate trust leading to kindness through
noise – (“Sex at 52”)

Just what is it [McKinnon](#) accomplishes in this new collection? A book that exists as a unified whole (as, arguably, all his collections do), in a poetry that can be dipped into anywhere, any page, and continued from that point. Call it extension, furthering, a broadening of the aesthetic he’s been building for decades. Not remaining still through continuing previous concerns, and turning them inside out, making this collection, in part, the answer to where his ongoing poetic research (for those who know enough to follow) is, exactly, now, in this new century, this new millennium. As McKinnon writes in the endnote of his “[Head Out \(A Letter, Essay, Poem – to Cecil Giscombe\)](#)”:

The title poses a great millennial question: if we know, with varying degrees of intensity the arbitrariness of what being *into dislocation* is, (aren’t we *all* in it, or about to be?) – then what is it to be *out of dislocation*? The *place* this question imagines is open to what human values we would presently wish to define it as (a real *place* without compromise or illusion?). What presence & location do humans anywhere have in the current psycho / sociology of what has happened / happening here / anywhere you care to look? The world’s largest clearcut in the Bowron valley is 40 minutes from Prince George – large, invisible; it’s “nothing”, they say. The unrecorded world, *this* close, (20 minutes from Giscombe) – yet, minimal fact given the human dislocations & disturbance of the larger daily world eco / human diaspora. A question:

the task of poetry?

poetry /

What I’ve wanted. The poem itself (an artifact / *real* place) – & I’ve also wanted the very moments of its act & its energy (integration / location) – to include, as well, a necessary, disintegration of its conscious *and* unconscious premises? By this I mean the practice I think I see in [George Stanley’s new work](#): he writes / builds a line that seems dismantled *at the same time* – to reveal accurate processes of mind and life moving to these jagged truths. This want of a new world? This want of the new poem! *Get a life!* I hear them say while “real life goes on” into and out of the language and world at hand – *into & out of ...*

Posted by [rob mclennan](#) at [12:57 PM](#) [No comments:](#)

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