

## Sound Logging Practices

### Barry McKinnon's Pulp Log

Like all successful poetry, Pulp Log operates on more than one level of possibility at the same time. It is about things that could only have happened here in Prince George, at CNC, now. But it is also about things that happen everywhere, all the time, to everybody. In other words, Pulp Log is true literally and figuratively. It is grounded in the very real and specific circumstances of its writer's life, yet it is about things that matter to any thinking and feeling person.

Think of Pulp Log as a series of concentric circles, like rings on a tree. Each circle is one set of references or one subject area that the book covers. But the circles are not independent of one another for each is contained within—and a part of—a larger circle, so that one thing said can be taken to apply to a very specific subject or to one or more larger frames of reference.

At the core, and close to the hearts of the readers of Asterisk are references to the daily trials and tribulations in the life of a faculty member at CNC. Have you ever had one of these moments:

the student who said, *I wasn't*  
*talking only moving my lips*...this is the mood, of being  
disarmed—sense of powerlessness:...they could instinctively  
form a group and kill you—the purpose, therefore, of a true  
education is...?

How about those mornings when you schlepp to work and realize that maybe today you'd rather be someplace else:

the building is industrial, gray edges, orange rugs  
torn and wearing (absolutely depressing). are you  
meditating or just tired, a colleague asks—these filled rooms I  
must fill with talk, or not get payed—barely a response to

anything said and each question I must answer myself—  
perhaps, plan it that way—the pattern, the soliloquy of  
technical terms.—a kind of loneliness, separation when you  
want a laugh, a smile, hints at recognition, a shared condition.

Even in these very specific passages there is a doubleness of meaning and implication: the unique event or thing described plus the emotional flavour of the thing described. McKinnon never just describes he's always showing us the thing and the feeling that goes with it.

Beyond the College there is life in Prince George in all its contradictions (no smoking signs at the pulp mills, for instance). He's very concerned with the serious social issues of our community:

mumbling old time loggers on George St. *know* there is no  
wood, no viable wood. this is the message of thinned streets,  
drunks, young men (their northern costumes of despair: long  
hair, acid-jeans, logo hats, smoke, drink beer at Joe's Place

But he is also aware of some of the cultural absurdities of Prince George, the logging town that would be world class:

a long talk over beer at O'Flahertys until  
a guy called the Crazy Hawaiian begins to sing Springsteen

There are many funny moments in this book.

Beyond local references, yet also contained in them, are what can only be called observations about life. Mainly they come in short aphoristic thrusts, wise observations that almost seem to surprise the writer as they come to him, that pierce right to the heart of something we've always known but could never quite get into words:

...life

as a breath, a sigh that we didn't know any better

and

truth is a sliver, what gets in as a mistake

What this all adds up to is that Pulp Log is a big little book. There is a tremendous breadth of feeling to it. It speaks to you and it speaks for you.

The literary critic in me wants to talk about innovative style and narrative persona and the multiple meanings of the words *log* and *pulp* but that's all shop talk and I should save it for one of those refereed journals whose editors have never taught technical writing or had to run out and start their cars every two hours because it's -40 C.

If you are not a reader of poetry don't worry. You might have some trouble with the book's episodic style, but not much. You owe it to yourself to read Pulp Log, attentively. It is about your life and struggles and triumphs. More than any institutional self evaluation it sorts out the conundrum that is CNC.

Don Precosky