

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LITERATURE CANADA IN

EDITED BY W.H. NEW

MCKINNON, Barry Benjamin. Poet, college lecturer, editor, publisher, printer; b Calgary 13 Oct 1944; son of Vivien (Dalton) and Benjamin McKinnon, a carpenter; educ Sir George Williams U (BA, 1967) and U British Columbia (MA creative WRITING, 1969). An instructor at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC, McKinnon wrote *I Wanted to Say Something* (1975; 1990) to retrace his origins in the farming backgrounds of both parents. A quest for identity in language, LANDSCAPE, and REGIONALISM, its reminiscences prompted by photos drawn from a family album, this book-length poem recalls the hardships endured by Alberta pioneers, who were forced off their farms and into cities by the Depression. Lorna CROZIER and

others later identified it as a precursor to subsequent prairie LONG POEMS (see KROETSCH, Eli MANDEL, SUKNASKI).

After a brief apprenticeship in typesetting and design with Talonbooks of Vancouver, McKinnon established the Caledonia Writing Series, producing chapbooks and broadsides by mimeograph or letterpress, often to accompany readings by poets he invited to Prince George. McKinnon's later imprints included Gorse P and Caitlin P (see also ZONAULO). An elliptical discourse on marital infidelity, real or imaginary, *Sex at Thirty-One* (1977) is one of several suites published as chapbooks during the 1970s and collected in *The the* (1981). *Arrhythmia* (1994), winner of the bpNichol Chapbook Award, was likewise compiled with other previously published sequences for *The Centre* (1995). Suspicious of knowledge systems, wary of falsehood and phoniness, McKinnon is uncommonly adept at writing *around* his subject, mapping 'places between discoveries,' and registering observations before they sublimate into fixed ideas. He is remotely associated with the RISH poets, and rejects the phrase line and conventional syntax in favour of quirky breaks, enjambement, scattered notation, contrapuntal voicing, and shifting points of view. His verse – circumspect, laconic, fragmentary, and poised in the moment – is characterized by LYRIC and anti-lyric impulses in tension: the result is seriality. *Pulp Log* (1991), winner of the Dorothy Livesay Prize, fuses prose poem with self-reflexive journal entry as its persona meditates on college life, aging, idle lusts, transience, repetition, and pollution. The whole suggests a critique of corporate forestry and the philistinism of mill culture, even as it affirms the value of community and, like earlier work, the solid ground of domestic love and family. See also Brian FAWCETT, Artie GOLD.

Further reading: John Harris, *Barry McKinnon* (Prince George, BC: Repository P, 1985); 'Poets and Print: Barry McKinnon talks with 10 British Columbia poet/publishers,' *Open Letter* 7:2 & 3 (Summer-Fall 1988); Don Precosky, 'Interview with Barry McKinnon,' *Essays on Canadian Writing* 32 (Summer 1986): 160–73.

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