



The Antigonish Review

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Review

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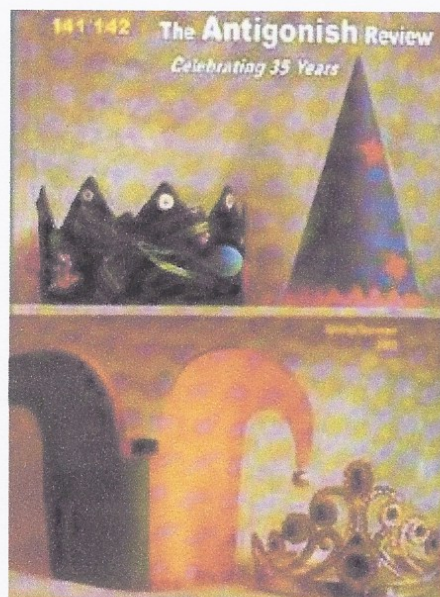
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The Centre, Poems 1970-2000
 by Barry McKinnon.
 (Talonbooks, 2004. 192 pages, \$18.95).



Cover Photograph: "Party Hats"
 by
Glenn Priestley

Barry McKinnon's most recent collection, *The Centre, Poems 1970-2000*, represents thirty years of writing, starting from his home base of Prince George, British Columbia in 1970, a year after he'd moved from Vancouver to teach at the newly-opened College of New Caledonia. Ottawa writer and publisher jwcurry once described McKinnon's poetry as the first half of any piece moving toward one central line, and the second half moving away from it. Subtitled "The Centre: Moving North," McKinnon himself places the collection in his territory of Prince George, as it was there that his formative years as a poet ended, and he came finally into his own. It seems telling that one of his publications after heading north was the chapbook *The Death of a Lyric Poet (Poems & Drafts)* (Caledonia Writing Series, 1975), as he ended one consideration and began another, drifting away from the shorter lyric to the longer open sequence. But for the rough notes (literally "drafts" of some of the finished pieces), he includes the collection as a whole.

The death of a lyric
 poet is living here

at the end of the line
 (p 27, Living Here)

Working in the poetic tradition of the procedural open-form, Barry McKinnon's poetry is finely tuned and honed, where the craft is there, but it's the movement that represents. As he said in 1983 (in an interview with Don Precosky in *Essays in Canadian Writing #32*, Summer 1986), "For me, writing sort of accompanies what I do. I do write very quickly and I don't spend a lot of physical or literal time at it. For me it's a process of *waiting* for it to happen." You can see it in various pieces such as "Thoughts Driving," that writes "onward up the road, it is you again driving some 10 / year path -"(p 95), or the short piece "Cabin: *early morning/June*," "not