

**THE CALEDONIA WRITING SERIES**

(began as *54° 40' Press*, became *The Caledonia Writing Series*, and ends as *Gorse Press*)

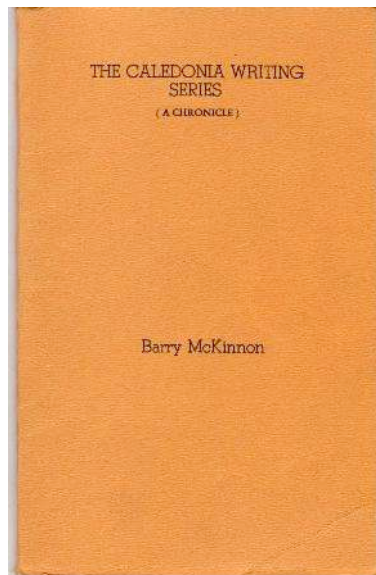
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**A CHRONICLE/BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**&**

**VISUAL**

**ARCHIVE**



**The 1984 cover**

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Barry McKinnon

# THE CALEDONIA WRITING

## SERIES

### (A Chronicle)

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#### Introductory Note Second Edition

*The Caledonia Writing Series (A Chronicle)* was written in 1984 and printed in an edition of 126 copies. The format was simple: a letterpressed title on an orange cover stock and a Xeroxed 8 1/2 x 11 folded/stapled 52 page chronicle/bibliography. In this version I've slightly revised the writing, but for the most part have left the 1984 text as is – urgently written those many years ago.

What will be most obvious in this present revision is the addition of visuals – covers, pages, broadsides etc., to accompany the text. I will add detail in this introductory note, as I will in the following sections of the CWS/Gorse Press chronicle and bibliography, that may be of interest beyond the original contexts of the story. A footnote, for instance, to our picaresque letterpress moves would now include the *last* move. My friend, the poet, artist, and teacher Simon Thompson bought my 10x15 Chandler Price letterpress, came to Prince George from Terrace with a truck full of tools, donned his blue mechanic's coveralls (Simon also studied auto mechanics during a sabbatical) - and started to dismantle the monster. I helped, but sadly did so with a mix of emotion. I knew that this was my final chapter with this old cast iron beauty and friend for the hundreds of hours I enjoyed the concentration and trance of printing, *but* happy to know Simon was the right young man to make it work/be active again.

We had to rent pullers to remove the flywheels and cogs, devise a pulley system to lift and hold the lop-sided weights, hammer out frozen shafts, and drag the various greasy and heavy cast iron parts to the basement entrance. Before the deconstruction, I spent a day with Simon going over the simplest basics of letterpress printing – enough so that at the end of the day with his name in 24 Kabel Light punched thru a few sheets of scrap paper, he was hooked, as they say, ready to engage letterpress printing and as with the poem, begin another *craft* so long to learn.

Two days later, with the bones carefully labeled so Simon could put them back together again, we began to load the Datsun box. It filled quickly with the variable speed motor, type cases, boxes of keys, chases, composing sticks, & the smaller press arms, cogs, wheels, and shafts.

A year later Simon returned to extract the main body; even if the truck did have room during the first move, the simple fact was that the remaining large parts *would not fit* through the back door. How did I get the damn press in? Did the house shrink? No matter the failure of my memory and puzzlement with the present task at hand, we had no choice but to chip at the cement for a few hours, grease two 2x12 planks to act as a ramp, and slowly with the help of friend and poet Ken Belford, winch the Chandler Price out to the back yard with two come-along-winchies.

Joy my wife, as we pondered our last problem, solved it: How to lift the last big bones up and into the Datsun box? Without hesitation, she phoned a tow truck company. A curious old pro-driver who had never had a tow request like this, arrived in minutes, attached his hooks and chains to the press, hit the hydraulic lift lever and twirled this tonnage to an exact spot on the truck bed, and charged us \$42.00

Simon tarped the press, worriedly checked the sagging truck springs and bulging tires, and drove down the alley with a bit of sway - very slowly – anxiously on his way.

The sections in the chronicle that describe my troubles at the college might seem over- simplified, speculative and reactive – and as I add further details in later pieces of writing about the Words/Loves conference which featured the American poet Robert Creeley - I might come-off as a paranoid. But as another writer once said: *a paranoid is often the one in true possession of the facts*. My main witness to the events I describe is my friend of 40 years, colleague, writer, critic, and printer, John Harris. His books, *Small Rain* and *Other Art*, in particular, are the best fictional sources that satirically capture and expose the conditions of our lives in the institution and its administration through the 1980's. Fiction implies exaggeration/ a world made-up to make a point or give experience a shape. However, I assure any reader of John's books that the stories are true to the dark events, unbelievable as they might seem. An overview of this period is included here.

For a more sober and researched exposition/account see: McKinnon and Harris, "No Method at All: the Story of the Liberal Arts at the College of New Caledonia." *Issues in Education and Culture*. The Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, May 1985: 53-58. In this essay we give a detailed analysis of the administrative forces that gutted the University Transfer Division in 1981 and managed the college for the next 9 years.

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## THE CALEDONIA WRITING SERIES: A CHRONICLE

The press began as 54° 40' Press, became The Caledonia Writing Series, and ends as Gorse Press

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Literary activity is never separate from the various contexts, situations and circumstances it arises from. In many respects, it is precisely the contexts and materials that really define it. The Caledonia Writing Series as I look at the history of it now, is a cupboard full of books, a bibliography, a stream of images (in some cases blurred) memory and anecdote. But whatever happened always seemed human, and any version of the story, by that fact, defies a conventional chronological history. Friend and fellow printer, Harvey Chometsky, asked me the other day, "Do you remember when we plugged the Dodson in for the first time without a rheostat and how the damn thing was going so fast it danced all over the floor?" I had forgotten that image: a huge letterpress ferociously opening and closing, dancing a crazy dance - *clunk clunk clunk clunk clunk* - shifting its own cast iron weight with such speed that we wondered what kind of magic it would require from us to actually print on it. There are many stories like that.

To go back to the beginning, I left Vancouver for Prince George in the summer of 1969, happy to have a job in the new college, but also apprehensive and scared. The notion of poetry and the teaching of liberal arts in a town that was initially skeptical to this kind of change (represented by a tax hike for a college with a mandate to establish the liberal arts) immediately gave me the sense that I made a mistake in accepting the job. I remember my wife, Joy, crying as we crossed the Fraser River Bridge into a hot stinky Prince George, and later that day, my own compounded anxiety after visiting the so-called college that consisted of two portable trailers and an office in an unused gym storage room at the local high school. This was it! But the principal had an obsessive vision that art and culture were going to arrive in the form of the staff he hired: musicians, poets, philosophers, and scholars-and that this raw pulp / logging primary resource city would move, he supposed, from the primitive to the cosmopolitan as a result of these new energies. A cockeyed notion, but he was enthusiastic enough to alter my instinct to turn around and leave; we were "chosen", as it were. I was also flat broke and the 57 Plymouth wouldn't go another inch.

Within a few months, everything at the college became very chaotic in a different way: a faculty split, a non-confidence vote against the administration, and the local distrust of these elitist hippy-looking imports. (I got kicked out of an apartment I rented for having moderately long hair). Finally, the principal's religious and autocratic insistence on a liberal educational philosophy seemed alien to the establishment's notion of real education, which to them meant an emphasis on career and vocational training. You learn Prince George's version of Newton's law: in this case, an equal force driving back. Yet in the midst of those early disparate forces, a small literary, academic and artistic community formed, and in some cases, survived the necessary tests.

Part of my job was to start a student literary magazine and as a teacher, particularly in creative writing, to involve the students in a way that made articulation of their experience reasonable and real (given the context of the skeptical attitudes about literature and poetry most of them grew up with). Loggers' kids, pulp mill workers, housewives, country kids, local eccentrics, and ordinary citizens took the courses, wrote their first college essays, wrote poems and stories and talked ideas over countless beers at the bar in the Inn of the North hotel. For me I don't think it was totally a question of survival (I thought I'd leave after a year or two), but it was necessary to confront the constant

pressure, and the task of going against the odds of the environment and my own inadequacies, to deal with the demands of what turned out to be a handful of very serious students who really wanted a world of language and thought, and wanted me to give it to them. What I was leaning to do mostly was to teach, and to deal with both the sense of my responsibility as a teacher and the sense that I would somehow be held responsible. There were times in the first few months I wanted to quit, but Charlie Boylan (an excellent teacher hired to teach English and Canadian Literature and start a student newspaper, and later fired for his politics) buoyed me up with his friendship and confidence. He saw things with a clarity I envied, and could go at the social and political scramble with a wonderful vengeance. For instance, he got wind of a new Canada Council scheme to pay writers to read their work, and began immediately to make contacts and organize what was to become a long standing reading series of over 100 readings in 14 years.

The first reading was the biggest test; it gave a measure of the town beyond the redneck-hard-macho surface that Prince George has always been known for - showing that whatever else the town wanted, it wanted also what the liberal arts offered. Charlie and I visited local schools, sent out letters and posters to schools in the college district and the local media, announcing a free concert by Tom Hawkin (a local folksinger well known in the area for his performances in Barkerville), and a poetry reading by Al Purdy (the famous Canadian poet that nobody here seemed to know about). Charlie's bait for a guaranteed audience was the folksinger, but Hawkin didn't show up and Charlie had to give his first public speech to 500 anxious people explaining that, "however! We have Al Purdy! ..." Then a long moment of silent tension until Purdy lolled onto the stage and loosened them up with jokes about how his two go-go girls *also* didn't show up! ... so all they were going to get was Al Purdy and his poems! It was a wonderful night: 500 people, trapped, so to speak, in the first official poetry reading in Prince George. But nobody left the hall. A sort of beginning.

A full-time teaching load, the poetry reading series, The Caledonia Writing Series, contact with writing students and writers, and this urge to make a place for writing and poetry, were to keep me busy for the next 14 years. In 1970 I edited a student magazine called *54°40'* (i.e. the longitude/latitude lines that cross at Summit Lake just north of Prince George), a magazine that featured student writing, photography and art. A group of students, in particular, Maureen Morton (a young artist raised in Prince George) and Larry Calvert (a curious Canadian lad who had just returned from Vietnam where he was a volunteer U.S. army journalist/photographer), volunteered their help and expertise for the two issues. This initial experience with *54°40'* gave me my first taste of what it was to edit, design and coordinate the production of a literary journal.



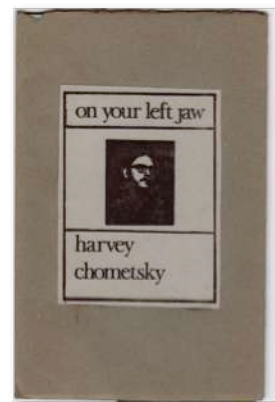
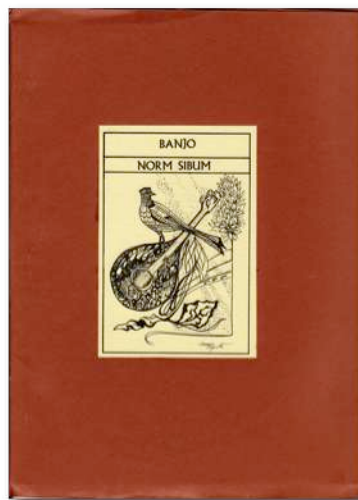
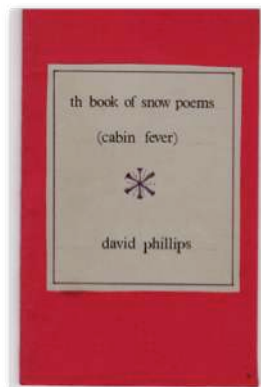
I spent the summer of 1972 working at Talonbooks, and became interested in the various aspects of book editing, book design and production - and also gained a sense of how the various levels of a small press operate (i.e. the financial, technical and political complexities that often interfere or shift aesthetic or editorial intent). David Robinson, one of Talonbook's original editors and its chief book designer, had moved from the 25 cent *Talon* magazine produced in his garage, out into the larger world of book publishing and Canadian literature. I found myself complaining about the editorial direction of the press, or lack of direction. My complaints, I suppose, were a result of Talon's move from a small (and therefore independent) to a larger more morally complex and expensive operation. Gardening books had to subsidize the poetry. I didn't really understand it and I didn't really want to.

Any sympathy I now have for people like Robinson, or anyone else foolish enough to persist against the odds of publishing poetry in Canada, only came after I started the Caledonia Writing Series.

**(Note:** I spent so much time doing this work by myself that the first person "I" as I use it in this chronicle is, for the most part, accurate. When I shift to the pronoun "we" and "our," I am referring to the many times when others helped out - moments of collective activity with Joy McKinnon, John Harris, Bill Bailey, Harvey Chometsky, and the students who worked during the two O.F.Y. (Opportunities for Youth) summers: Louis Stevenson, Patti Van Nuus, Robert Riggan, Robert Moen, Virginia Marsolais, and others who might have dropped by the old warehouse for a visit, sometimes to find themselves collating, gluing, binding and printing. Many of the books and broadsides could be annotated with a list of personnel who helped in the process).

I always liked the chapbook concept. I'd worked in the stacks of the Sir George Williams University Library in 1965-66 and remember digging through the Canadian poetry section to find the Ryerson series, Contact books like *Moving In Alone* by John Newlove, the McGill series, Delta and Tishbooks etc. For a one-man press operation, the notion of producing small books or chapbooks made good sense (i.e. books quickly and cheaply printed and a way to get recent work quickly out into the bookstores that take them, and into the mail to writers, reviewers, and friends you hope to get a response from). Ezra Pound's lesson of taking things into your own hands and keeping the overhead to a minimum was good practical advice, as was bill bissett's notion of "printing, as a natural extension of writing." Nelson Ball (*Weed Flower*), bp nichol (*Ganglia*), George Bowering (*Tish, Imago*), Gerry Gilbert (*B.C. Monthly*), bill bissett (*Blewointment*), Andy Suknaski (*Elfin Plot*) etc. - were among the models and sources I followed. Up north, the active populated southern centers with "culture" seem remote, so you start a press - start anything out of necessity. Besides, I was curious about the local, the local voice, and I needed to make an attempt to deal with and reflect this place I'd found myself in. The press began.

The first chapbook I printed was *Th Book of Snow Poems (Cabin Fever)* by David Phillips in 1972 under the press name 54°40'. David's book was followed by Norm Sibum's first book *Banjo* (and the first title under the Caledonia Writing Series logo). When Norm got the chapbook book he was pleased; I remember he particularly felt that the sequencing of the poems was the good result of my fine editing. I laughed and wrote him to say: *Norm, I printed the poems in exactly the same order I received them!*



*On Your Left Jaw* was the first book by the young Prince George poet, Harvey Chometsky. The first series of chapbooks, including Harvey's, were all printed on the school Gestetner in editions of approximately 100 copies. The format was fairly standard: 8 1/2" x 11" Gestetner cover stock, and the 11" cover and text usually folded in half, a hand sewn or stapled spine, and construction paper cover-wraps with offset label stickers for the cover and title pages. With the exception of a few label designs printed by commercial printers, all of the work (typing, printing, collating, folding, sewing, stapling, gluing, etc.) was done by hand.

My original intention, and one I pretty well stuck with, was to publish a mix of local writers and outside writers, usually better known, who had manuscripts small enough to handle given my full time teaching load. The college at that time, on an informal level, gave me the use of the Gestetner mimeo and later, off-hour use of a Gestetner offset press that I convinced them to buy (arguing that they could cut their Xerox expenses). Various briefs and proposals drafted by me, and later by John Harris (a teaching colleague who was continuing *Repository* magazine and his book-publishing program in Prince George) were written to "formalize" a commitment by the college to an active publishing program. Beyond the chapbooks, we envisioned books and anthologies and other printed materials that could be used as textbooks and reference - a press along the lines of the large university sponsored presses that publish literary and scholarly work usually not of interest to commercial houses. Maybe we got naively ahead of ourselves, partly out of an attempt to "legitimize" the activity and get financial support. The Caledonia Writing Series, as a press name, connected the college with the publishing that followed; that connection was loosely defined yet remained because of the donation of space, equipment, and some materials, particularly during two O.F.Y. projects which involved College of New Caledonia students in the summers of 1973 and 1974.

My sense now is that the administration was afraid of a financial commitment and that it began to fear literary activity (which did eventually embroil administrators, students, and various public officials - right up to the provincial government level - in an obscenity/pornography debate, because of the Harris/McKinnon *Pulp Mill* local short story anthology used as a text in some first year English courses)



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John Harris  
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Lynn Hall  
The Circus

Brett Stewart  
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Barry McKinnon  
Last Lodge

Linda Wilkine Johnson  
Bleeding

discuss photos by Joy McKinnon / cover by Bruce Baycroft

- Acknowledgements -

Brian Fawcett's stories were published out of Vancouver  
in *Big / Small's "Muskal"* and in *Tom / McKinnon's*  
"Last Lodge" came out as a plastic-wrapped porno-pamphlet  
from Pulp Press / Johnson's "Bleeding" was in *Repository*  
1972.

A story in the *Pulp Mill* called "Walking Cunt," by Brian Fawcett, probably caused the stir. Most students enjoyed this collection because it dealt with situations, places, and experiences that had some direct immediacy for them. The book was interesting to teach because we could tackle this alienating notion that literature and life only happened in Paris or San Francisco etc., but not in Prince George. Fawcett's story tells of a middle-class clump of youths in cars, drunk on beer, ceaselessly circling the main downtown streets for that one girl or woman ("walking cunt") who would "educate" them - a story of sexual disappointment, cruelty, and desperation - really, a moral tale about adolescent male

behavior and sexuality. The principal received complaints about the anthology and asked me in the hall one day if the collection was pornographic. I assured him jokingly that the Canada Council had given us a grant to publish the book and it could therefore *not* be pornographic! For him, the issue seemed threatening and possibly devastating, given the paradox of a tradition for academic freedom, which Harris and I were exercising, and public pressure that wanted, in this case, a book banned or censored, or at least taken out of the class. The reaction to the word "cunt," no matter the context, put Harris and me in jeopardy, although no official action was taken. One English teacher insisted that "they" were eventually going to get "us" - and he may have been right. Apropos of that incident, our second anthology, *The Pulp Mill (Poetry)*, published some years later (1980) was kept out of the college bookstore for a week because, as I was warned by a college administrator, the principal didn't approve of it. The book had to get "special" administrative clearance before my students could buy it.

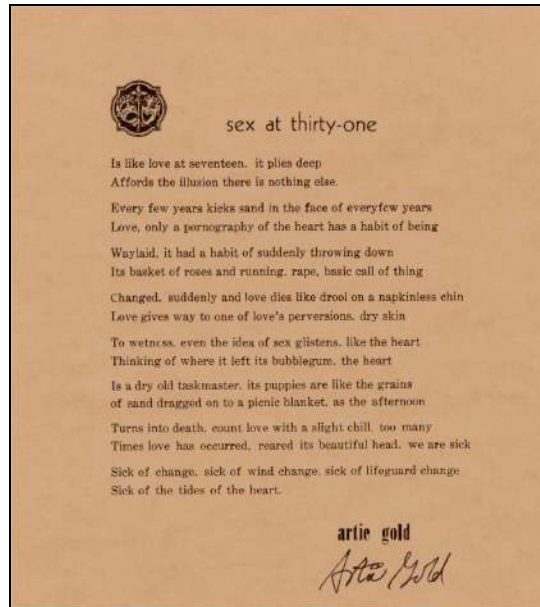
By 1977 the college was quickly becoming a "real" college with new buildings and an expanding administration. There was initial and lasting support from a sympathetic dean, but the pervasive and final administrative response was that our idea for an integrated college press was not a priority, despite the college mandate regarding community involvement, and despite our willingness to take the responsibility for running it. Even after the move from a college of trailers and borrowed vocational buildings, one old building was kept and formed the physical centre for our activity. This building, called The Warehouse, was half a block from the new facility, and housed the art department, the drama department, the print shop, our offices, and a few classrooms. It became a central hangout for students, visiting writers, artists and anyone else who didn't feel comfortable in the sterile atmosphere of the new campus.

There were many instances when visiting writers extended their stay and got involved with the press at The Warehouse. Poems, short books and collaborations were spontaneously printed over an evening or afternoon. *Sex at 31*, a pamphlet by Pierre Coupey and myself, began as a collaborative poem/satire/joke scribbled on a cigarette package during a party, and got printed the next day.

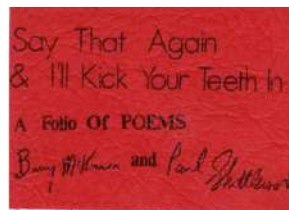
Likewise, Artie Gold wrote and printed his version of *Sex at 31* during a visit to Prince George - a good enough spontaneous poem later published in Margaret Atwood's *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*.



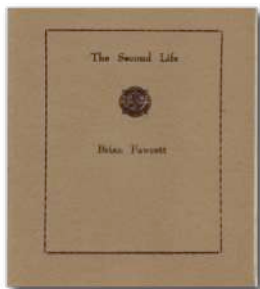




Paul Shuttleworth, a beautifully haywire Irish American poet, trying to escape civilization by moving from San Francisco to MacKenzie (a small company town 100 miles north of Prince George) bought some of the Caledonia Writing Series books in a local store and wrote a kind note to say how much he enjoyed them, and that he was surprised to see small press activity "up here". Over that winter we hooked-up, taught a course together, talked poetics and eventually collaborated on a publication of broadsides called *Say That Again and I'll Kick Your Teeth In: a folio of poems*. The title was a humorous attempt to match the toughness we saw in the local bars, and to satirize the "sensitive" poetry chapbook stereotype.

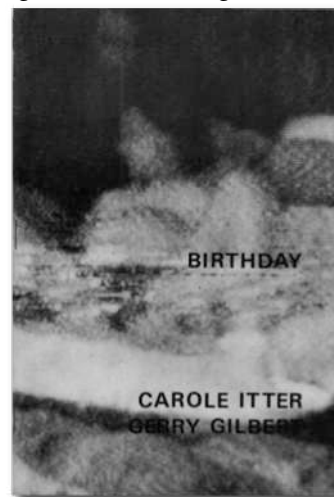


The poet Pat Lane on one of his visits got drawn into an afternoon of collating. He didn't seem too happy about it and asked, "Isn't this what people in mental hospitals do?" We probably took that as a suggestion to quit for the day and go to the bar. There were other times: I remember printing, *The Second Life* with Brian Fawcett, a book complete with a spoof numbering system, and internal jokes. Fond days in our lives.



Harris and I held our classes in The Warehouse and hid out there for days at a time (except for momentary visits to the college to get our mail or attend a compulsory meeting). I think now that we were trying to sustain an alternate version *or* perhaps the original version of what the college was supposed to be, resisting as we did the administrative and educational shifts that had more to do with quantity than quality. The "systems- approach" finally won. The managers took over with their strange administrative jargon and official behavior. We were eventually absorbed into the system - and driven into our basements and garages after The Warehouse was closed. But that old warehouse, for a while, from my perspective, *was* the college: English classes, poetry readings, the constant talk of poetry, writing, politics and art; presses running for posters, books, broadsides and student newsletters or ecological manifestoes, etc. We were doing cultural work with conviction. Occasionally a curious dean or director or assistant would walk through to see what was up and jot down serial numbers off a press or ask a few questions. We were obviously suspect, but we had nothing to hide, a fact which *really* confused them.

Direct financial support, other than our own personal contributions and income from sales, came from two main sources: O.F.Y. and the Canada Council. The Canada Council book publishing program was set up to help small non-commercial Canadian literary publishers and required an eligibility criteria before individual titles would be subsidized for printing. Once a publishing house became eligible (i.e. a set number of literary titles per year), it could submit manuscripts to the Canada Council. The manuscripts would then be given to a group of readers. I managed in 10 years or so to get about \$2000.00 through this program but the procedure always struck me as paradoxical: presumably an editor who submitted a manuscript had already decided the worth of its publication, but the group of anonymous jury readers really became an editorial board with power to accept or reject the application for a publishing grant. A further irony involved *Birthday* by Gerry Gilbert and Carole Itter. The grant application for funding was rejected by the Council readers, but later, the Canada Council Book Purchasing Program, another arm of the Council, bought 100 copies for national distribution.

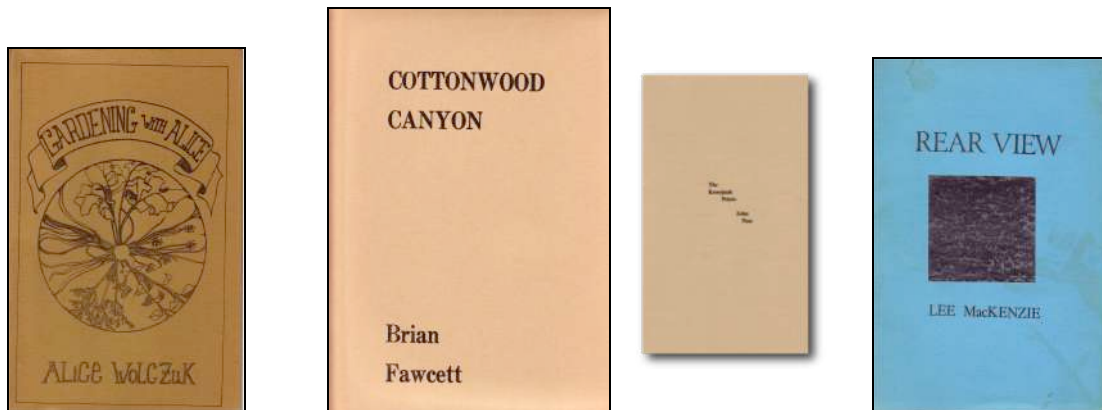


These were not great problems, but created on the one hand, a desire for independence from granting institutions, and on the other, a desire to expand the operation with the money these grants provided. For me, a Canada Council rejected manuscript usually meant a longer wait before I could print it, or forced an altered, cheaper design. At any rate, the money we did get, at times kept the press going and allowed some purchase of equipment and materials.

The O.F.Y. program paid salaries of \$100.00 per week for several students during the two summers of 1973 and 1974. The briefs to O.F.Y. proposed the publication of books that would have a particular local interest, and that required substantial physical labour because of their size. Titles printed during this period include *Gardening With Alice*, a local/northern gardening book by long time resident gardener and short story writer, Alice Wolczuk; *Rearview*, a series of satiric sketches by Lee MacKenzie about the history of Prince George, and also produced by Lee as part of a B.C. Centennial project; *From the Minds of Children*, an anthology of children's poetry edited by Virginia Marsolais, a book that began as an assignment in a first year English class; *Cottonwood Canyon*, the long poem by Brian Fawcett that gives a view and source definition of Prince George in the 50's and 60's; *The Kenojuak Prints*, a series of poems based on Eskimo prints, by John Pass. Pass's book was the first letterpress book in the series (printed by Bill Bailey and Robert Riggan) and gave us our first

experience with letterpress printing, and a lesson in the importance of having proofs edited. The first version is full of typesetting errors. A second version was corrected and printed on the Gestetner offset press, but few copies of this run remain. A box containing the unbound text was thrown into the garbage by mistake.

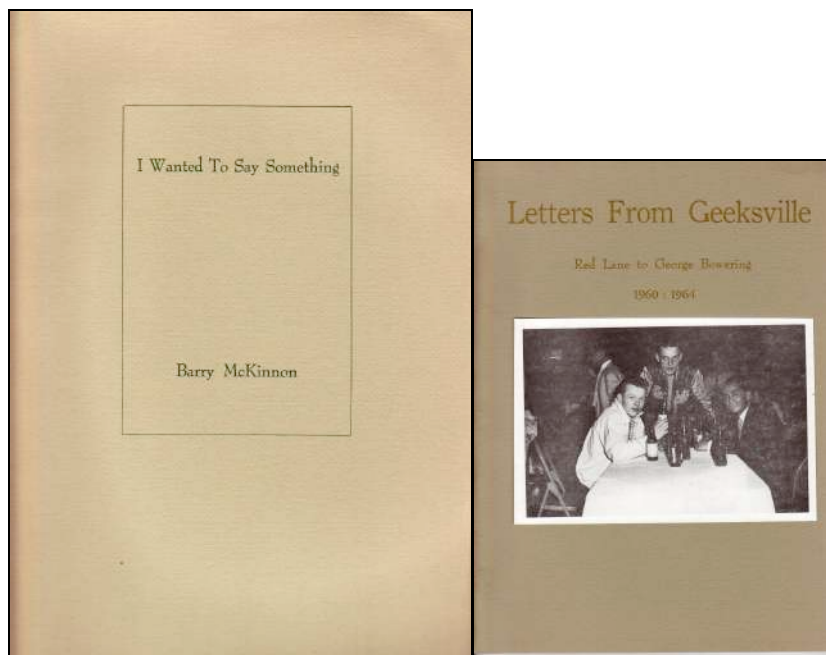
The catch with O.F.Y. grants was that very little of the grant money could be used for material costs. The \$500.00 that we did get, however, bought paper, paid for typesetting, and got us started.



In terms of the one-man-operation notion, these two summers were difficult. The more people involved, no matter their interest and ability (and this ranged from those with wonderful and skilful enthusiasm, to the few who didn't show up with any regularity, or who botched the jobs), the more scattered the energies and the more difficult it was to manage the operation. In a sense, we were a group of amateurs trying to run a press along the lines of a sophisticated established press (complete with catalogues, markets, and books that had the potential to be commercial successes, etc.), but borrowed equipment and facilities and the lack of technical knowledge, made for difficulties despite the group's general sense of purpose. My practical advice to anyone interested in starting a small press, and who doesn't have a background in printing technology, would be to send the printing out to professionals, unless you stay with simple mimeo or letterpress. My experience with equipment (particularly offset presses), and the physical task of producing a book, alternated between the joy of seeing an interesting design or a clear printed page shoot onto a paper tray, and the angry frustration of seeing, in the next moment, those pages hopelessly gnarled into a wad around countless cogs and rollers - *and* never really being able to solve the problems with any certainty or technical accuracy. For instance, the Gestetner offset had a gizmo called a two-sheet eliminator, which in theory stopped extra sheets from feeding into the press, but no matter how many times I adjusted the simple control screw, there were two fairly constant results: *no* sheets or *lots* of sheets. The Gestetner mimeo was much simpler and very workable but limited us to standard white paper stocks and standard typewriter typefaces for the stencils. The offset technology expanded design possibilities - we tried to make the books look "real" - but the offset press required a fairly complex knowledge of ink/water/feed systems that must work in synchronous fashion before clear printing results. My one-week course in Vancouver in the Gestetner showroom never prepared me for the years of frustration to follow. Half my time was spent up to my inky elbows digging out wads of paper jammed inside a machine, or adjusting ink and water to eliminate dark ink smears or images washed out from too much water. The process of doing everything (editing, designing, and printing in the long run, might have been more expensive (i.e. wasted time and wasted supplies) - while we learned, haphazardly, how these mysterious machines worked. With the advent of new print technologies, this may be the case

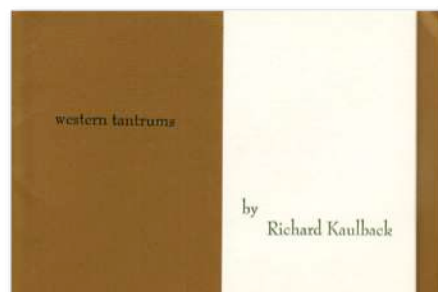
even more in the future. But it must be said that the machines brought and kept us together as a small community of writers, and kept us in control of production (even though the end results were sometimes discouraging). We had fun being together, poking our wrenches into the cogs, and theorizing ways to solve or cover the mistakes.

In 1975 I bought a second hand A.B. Dick tabletop for \$750.00, a press with fewer adjustments and much simpler to operate, and quite capable of professional quality work. (I think that Coach House Press printed some of their early books on a similar A.B. Dick.) But in our case, to cut costs, we used paper plates instead of the more durable metal ones, and got hundreds of pages of inconsistent or washed out texts. *Rearview*, *I Wanted to Say Something*, *Letters From Geeksville* and many smaller books were printed on the A.B. Dick



Earlier, in 1973 we discovered that the college had acquired and stored a Dodson 10 x 15 Letterpress from Uncle Ben Ginter's sale of equipment after his short-lived *Prince George Progress* weekly paper folded. (Ben Ginter is one Prince George character familiar to people in B.C. through the 60's and 70's, and was one local embodiment of the northern dream. He started out, they say, with one D 9 Caterpillar and amassed a few million dollars, which he invested in various enterprises that eventually went bankrupt or into receivership. He became really well known for his Uncle Ben's Brewery that produced a potent 10% he-man local beer.) The Dodson was used from that point on by O.F.Y. groups, John Harris, myself, and the students who took English 165.

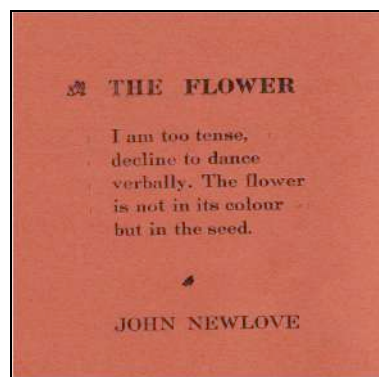
English 165, a course in creative printing, ran for a couple of years but was cancelled in 1980, and the equipment sold to another college. I was never given substantial reasons for the cancellation. At the time, one of the college goals and objectives was that each division develop and provide a community interest course for college credit. The printing class, in a sense, was the English Department's "practical" non-academic offering for the community. Space and equipment limitations meant that enrollment had to be kept to a maximum of 10 students, a



condition that may have led the administration to revise their stance toward English 165, given the pressure to fill classes in the Liberal Arts Division to the contractual maximum of 35. "Frill" courses, or courses with "low" enrollments were being cut, and as one colleague told me, the administration considered me an amateur printer and therefore, I suppose, unqualified. I would have agreed with the "amateur" assessment, but could have shown, for instance Richard Kaulback's unique letter press productions of his poetry, or Alice Wolczuk's anthology of broadsides.

The class was practical and useful, particularly for those students in my creative writing class who had first books to print. These students and bibliophiles wanted to know something of the history and basics of printing, and enjoyed the print shop atmosphere of good talk, ink smells, clanking, presses and the centuries-old art and joy of printing words on paper. Cutting the printing course was the first clear withdrawal of college support for this aspect of my work. I never did get clear information about the fate of our old Ginter/Dodson press, but did hear from a friend of mine who worked in Building Services that the lead type was melted down by a Vocational Faculty member into a ball and chain that was used at stag parties. I don't doubt this story. It acts as a kind of disgusting metaphor for the questionable goings-on at many levels of the college during this period.

During the life of the press we were always engaged in equipment scrounging - a picaresque activity that led us into some funny, strange and expensive experiences. I remember once sitting in a Prince George bar with Harvey Chometsky and John Newlove in the early 70's. Harvey and I had just looked at a press owned by an old press scrounger named Smiley - and got took, as they say, for \$300.00. This so-called press was one of those short-lived aberrations in the long history of printing. I saw one again in Sandpoint Idaho - a Multigraph; I'd forgotten the name until I saw it there as an antique in a store window display. The press involved hand setting type on a grooved drum that was then fastened to a hand crank platen system. Lines broke off, and the type that was left, smashed through the hand fed sheets because the pressure couldn't be controlled. Hours, days and weeks of frustration passed until we abandoned the idea of using it. Anyway, Newlove said he didn't know exactly what we had described to him that day in the bar, but enthusiastically said that we might as well buy it. I thought he would "know" - being an editor at McClelland and Stewart. Interestingly enough, the only remaining evidence of this early "Multigraph period" of our printing activities is a broadside by John Newlove called "The Flower" in an edition of 25 copies on scrap construction paper, and a botched job on two of Ken Belford's poems. Some months later, Lee MacKenzie, friend and neighbor and author of *Rearview*, got his school to buy this press so that his "slower" and "less motivated" students could typeset their own newsletter and thereby learn to spell and compose sentences. I didn't go into much detail about how the press "worked" and Lee didn't want to hear any horror stories and I wanted the 300 bucks he convinced his administration to spend. It never worked; Lee left town and the press sat unused as a conversation piece in the staffroom of the school. That Multigraph might still be there, but I doubt it.



Our biggest equipment-find happened in 1974 when an older College of New Caledonia student, Clarence Wood of Barkerville, decided to sell out the contents of his print shop for \$3500. We made a trip to Barkerville and looked the stuff over: antique paper cutters, an obsolete Verigraph typesetter, two Chandler Price platen presses, an A.B. Dick tabletop offset press, cases of assorted type, boxes of paper, business card stock, typesetting, furniture, slug cutters, etc., etc. The college bought about half of the inventory, and Harris, myself and Bob Atkinson (also of Repository press, living, and teaching in Prince George) bought and split up the rest. Some of it was quite usable, in particular the 10 x 15 Chandler Price that I've used since to print C.W.S. and Gorse Press books and broadsides. But again, much of the equipment was outmoded, worn out and unwieldy. By now we had tons of equipment for the print course, Repository Press and C.W.S. - and obviously some experience in moving this kind of weight around. Some of our presses were moved three or four times to various locations, and each time it seemed we used a different combination of methods: come-along winches, rollers, Hi Abs, greased sheets of plywood, dismantling devices and always four or five guys with an ingenious application of muscle to balance and push and slide these top heavy monsters. Ironically, or perhaps understandably, considering, some of the junk we bought, the printing quality only improved slowly. The letterpress printing did get better. We taught ourselves out of old manuals and hit and miss experimentation; with practice, patience and perseverance, we eventually got some control and respect for those beautiful moving parts and what they could produce.

Once we got involved with scrounging, equipment started coming our way even though we weren't particularly looking for it. Speedy Printers used to cut our paper stock, but on more than one occasion I came out of their shop with things like antique line cameras, quartz light systems, flip-top plate-makers, and boxes of scrap off-cuts that often became small books or broadsides. When printers replace a system, they often can't sell the equipment they're replacing. They would say to me, "if you want it get it out in the next hour or it goes to the dump!" or, "give me \$100.00 for the works!" Likewise, *The Citizen*, Prince George's daily newspaper, tried to give me two huge photo process linotypes worth "thousands" but outmoded for their operation. I didn't take them; I couldn't envision a truck or room big enough to hold them, and suspect that they ended up in the dump or at a scrap metal dealer.

Our last big trip for equipment got us out to Ken Belford's homestead near Hazelton B.C. Ken was given an 11 x 17 Chandler Price Platen press and had some original plan to run it with a water wheel. He moved the press onto the land (near the creek) and left it under a tarp for about two years, taken as he was by other priorities like building a log cabin, raising a bit of stock and trying to survive. It was seized up with rust and probably wouldn't have lasted another winter. John Harris and I loaded it into his Datsun truck and headed back to Prince George at 35 miles per hour (for 350 miles) with what became a familiar but frightening sway of the truck at every corner we came to. The weight of the press didn't topple us into the ditch, but it did cause enough strain to burn out John's motor. I sold the press to John; he restored it and then more or less gave up this level of printing when his marriage broke up. John Pass bought the press, moved it to Vancouver, and later moved it to Ruby Lake on the Sechelt Peninsula where he now lives.

The common aspect shared by most Canadian small literary presses is the fact that there isn't a large sustaining market for small press literature. In my case, the editing and presswork was so time consuming that the last and very important task of selling the books became an added burden. Free distribution included 30 to 40 people (writers, friends and reviewers) who got copies of everything we did; I took books to sympathetic bookstores across the country and left them on consignment. Many of these stores, I might add, would go out of business so that we never got our money or the unsold copies. We had standing orders from Canadian universities and colleges that brought in some of the income we needed to continue our publishing. In 1976 Brian Fawcett and myself, in an attempt to increase sales and distribution, mailed out 100 copies each of *Songs and Speeches* (Barry McKinnon with drawings by young Claire McKinnon), *Maple Leaf Band* (by Peter Huse), and *Letters From Geeksville*:

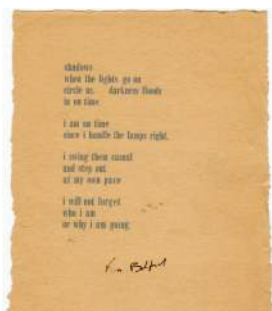
*Letters from Red Lane to George Bowering* (edited by George Bowering). These publications were included and packaged as part of Brian's mimeographed newsletter *No Money From the Government* with a not so subtle note that we'd gladly accept donations to cover our printing and mailing expenses – a kind of reverse marketing with no obligation to buy, but an accompanying guilt if you didn't. We generated some interest and response to the mail-out and received in total, a few meager dollars – but not enough to convince us to try this kind of “marketing” scheme again. As the poet David Phillips once said, and what we had to eventually accept versus any mercantile presumption and motive: *the work is free!*



Later on, my Gorse Press (a simplified offshoot of C.W.S) joined forces with Repository Press in Prince George, and Tatlow House in North Vancouver in another collaborative effort to increase distribution and sales.

More than once I was given advice on business end of things. Stan Shaffer, a teaching colleague, and I had dinner with Stan's father, Harold - he was then head of the Sir George Williams School of Retailing - and he advised me to push the limited edition idea, stress the rarity aspect of the product, and *charge huge prices!* This advice was given after I told him that I was having trouble selling the books at cheap or even "reasonable" prices. His logic: the higher the price, the fewer I'd have to sell for a return - and that people who wanted the books would see the value and would pay the asking price anyway.

In my years of printing and publishing, I didn't use more than one current account deposit book. As a business, the operation never broke even. Most of the work was given away. Ultimately, I decided to let Bill Hoffer, the infamous west coast bookseller and self-declared antennae of Canadian literature, settle the question of value and price. He bought copies of everything we printed and skillfully hunted down bits of information and gossip about books and broadsides for his catalogues. He seemed to know everything because of his countless hours of coffee and talk with almost every B.C. and Canadian writer - like turning over a big literary rock. I printed a broadside ("Shadows" by Ken Belford) and got so tired of typesetting that I ran the poem without typesetting Ken's name. I signed each copy "Ken Belford" in my own handwriting. Hoffer must have checked out Ken's signature somewhere in the back room archive, compared it with the signed copies, and



rightfully reported in his catalogue that the signature was a fake; he probably upped the price because the hoax had become part of the artifact's value.

shadows

when the lights go on  
circle us.    darkness floods  
in on time.

i am on time  
since i handle the lamps right.

i swing them casual  
and step out  
at my own pace

i will not forget  
who i am  
or why i am going

He had a great eye. But it must be said that he was a main support of the Caledonia Writing, Series, not only because he bought all of the books and broadsides (the one exception was that he didn't want gardening or cookbooks) - but because of his interest in and respect for our work. Within the bitchy politics of writing and publishing in this country, Hoffer believed our press gave off some light, and that made a difference at points when it seemed useless and unimportant to continue.

I ended Caledonia Writing Series in 1979. My motives were partly practical. The teaching load increased steadily and required much more of my time. We never found a permanent location for the equipment and the prospect of moving it repeatedly (as was the pattern) wasn't too appealing. After The Warehouse closed I moved the Chandler Price letterpress from our last location (Studio 2880, a Community Arts Council sponsored a gallery with studio space with more house rules than I cared to follow) - to a corner in my basement. John Harris, the one person, friend and partner close to the history and politics of publishing in Prince George, and I began to realize the advantages of getting smaller and smaller as publishers, which is partly an indication of our lessening energy for publishing on the scale we had been working and dreaming, but also a tactic born of personal necessity.

The community for writing and publishing that was created and sustained for 7 years (as the Caledonia Writing Series), and the publishing since then, was eroded by forces that weren't always clear, though we knew they were always there. In retrospect, there are many specifics: professional Development proposals that involved writing or editing were being questioned by the college administration. Minimal amounts of money required for advertising poetry readings, or to pay visiting writers for classroom visits was near impossible to get. The Words/Loves Poetry Conference (February, 1980) featuring Robert Creeley, and attended by 200 writers, teachers and students, was frustrating to organize and I almost cancelled it because of the administration's hesitant support.

Once into the 1980's certain cultural, political, and educational shifts did become clear to everybody. The college, via its management hierarchy, was given license to do as it pleased with post-secondary education and initiated directions that skirted the original mandate for balanced course offerings in the academic, career, and vocational programs. Arts courses all but disappeared despite the local and regional demand for them. (In the spring semester of 1983, 100 students were on wait-lists for



English courses. Two English teachers were laid-off that semester). Since 1978, Spanish, French, the Theatre Program, Printing, Classics, Shakespeare, American Literature, and Music were cut as regular offerings, leaving only a limited "core" of standard University Transfer Arts and Science courses for those students who want university training. The nearest universities with complete program offerings are 500 miles to the south or east.

This 80's push was meant to create a polytechnical, high-tech oriented institution to train students for specialized jobs in business and industry: CAD/CAM (Computer Assisted Design/Computer Assisted Management), Robotics, goals/objectives, system approaches, and computerized learning situations were key concepts for these new directions, directions that created, in their wake, an educational and institutional environment in which poetry, the arts, and what they could teach, appeared unimportant, impractical or out of touch.

In an overall cultural and economic context, the concern for aligning and reshaping education with the micro-chip revolution is perhaps legitimate, but the administration of that process must move with care, consultation, and concern for those who will presumably be served by it. This did not happen here. Since 1980, students, faculty, the faculty union, and the public of Prince George, have fought the often ill-conceived, wasteful experiments and innovations that give the appearance of progress and accountability (some consider these moves "visionary"), but that finally resulted in human and educational losses that will take a long time to calculate fully. Those who might be held responsible have moved on, or up in the system and are out of sight.

This battle at the college involved two non-confidence votes by both faculty and students, an expensive external investigation of the management/staff relations, a self-study critical in its suggestions and recommendations, advisory committee resignations, letters, petitions and demonstrations protesting course cuts and many faculty dismissals - a long and continuous storm of controversy. But none of this activity stopped, altered, or delayed the shape the college was to take, and no one on the outside in the larger governing centres to the south, seemed to know or care about what was going on in this northern outpost. A long, frightening and unbelievable story.

My own situation at CNC in 1983 was not a pleasant one, but it may give a clearer sense of the system we have struggled with to keep alive what we value. In January of that year I was "laid off" after 14 years of teaching, and defined as "redundant" on the basis of a change in English offerings for career students. A decision was made that these students don't require English courses - at least in traditional formats - and Creative Writing, representing 1/5, and never more than 2/5 of my workload, was also cut. The case went public. There was a public and tough outcry from those who wanted to fight, not only for my job, but also for a more humane, open, responsible and responsive community college. They wanted to keep the teachers, the programs, and the courses that had contributed to the quality of life and education in the community, and to insure educational opportunities for themselves and their children.

Brian Fawcett and Pierre Coupey started a campaign on my behalf and brought pressure to bear from the outside. About 50 prominent Canadian writers, teachers, and poets - most had read here, or knew the press, and felt a personal connection with the principles and issues the lay-off embodied - wrote letters to the newspaper, the principal and the college council, condemning the administration for its actions. The lay-off was rescinded in May 1983, and I was given two sections of English, and a job working in a new division of the college called the Developmental Centre, where I administered and marked self-paced English modules and packages for students with basic literacy problems. Creative Writing was not re-instated. The poetry series became dormant.

My contact with students who are or might be interested in creative writing (students like Meryl Duprey, a marvelous young local poet) was diminished. The college, as a meeting place for local writers, simply isn't there anymore. I've driven over the Fraser Bridge many times since 1969. Coming up from the south, I cross the bridge and in an instant, think of years past and the countless images a life accumulates: the beauty of the northern landscape, the city, seasons, people, friends - and that first hot day when the future was only a moment ahead, when one's fate was only a dream. Five minutes from the bridge, down through South Fort, I'm at 1420 Gorse Street - a two story, clapboard house, built circa 1917, where the poets visit - willow tree out front the kids sit in, this basement where the books sit on shelves, this desk I write from, the press over by the back door.

In a way, you become something of the place you set out to discover - and in a breath, call it home.

## Gorse Press Bibliography Introductory Note

The Caledonia Writing Series ended in 1978.

I started Gorse Press as a small private press and a way to continue printing and publishing poetry – but without the same scope or energy and time required to publish and fight within the various accumulating resistances (and expenses on every level) that I had been experiencing. I've included the first Gorse items – mostly broadsides and a couple of projects with John Harris my friend and colleague and editor of Repository Press – as the final section of the *Caledonia Writing Series Bibliography*.

For me, 1980 echoed the poet/musician Jim Morrison's line: *this is the end*. The Words/Loves Conference (see Gorse broadsides printed for the event) - was both the climax *and* end of my visible institutional activity as a poet, cultural organizer, and publisher for reasons outlined in *Caledonia Writing Series: A Chronicle*.

I still had the Chandler Price letterpress in my basement to print broadsides and covers. I still wanted to host a few poetry readings, and I still wanted to hang onto the poem and the activities surrounding it as a truer measure of value. But the portents I sensed - and a subsequent burnout in the college's noxious "new reality" chronicled in CWS - kept me more or less dormant for the next two or three years.

In 1985 I had an educational leave and moved to Vancouver for a year. While my wife Joy attended Simon Fraser University, I worked on several projects: *Poets and Print: talks with 10 British Columbia poet/publishers* published as an issue of *Open Letter*. (Seventh Series, Nos. 2-3: Summer/Fall 1988), *The Pulp Mill, an Anthology of Prince George Writing* for Repository Press, and an ongoing sequence of poems. My friend, the poet David Phillips, lived in North Vancouver. Over beers at the Railway Club – we'd meet there for "office hours" almost every Saturday afternoon for eight months - we decided to combine Gorse Press with his Tatlow House (with its one notable and important BC poetry anthology: *The Body*, 1979). We decided to print a series of cheaply produced chapbooks. We each had manuscripts of our own, but also wanted to print small books by a few writers we knew, respected, and who were proximate. Over the winter and spring we managed to print four titles in the series: a manuscript by David, Billy Little (Zonko), myself, and George Stanley.

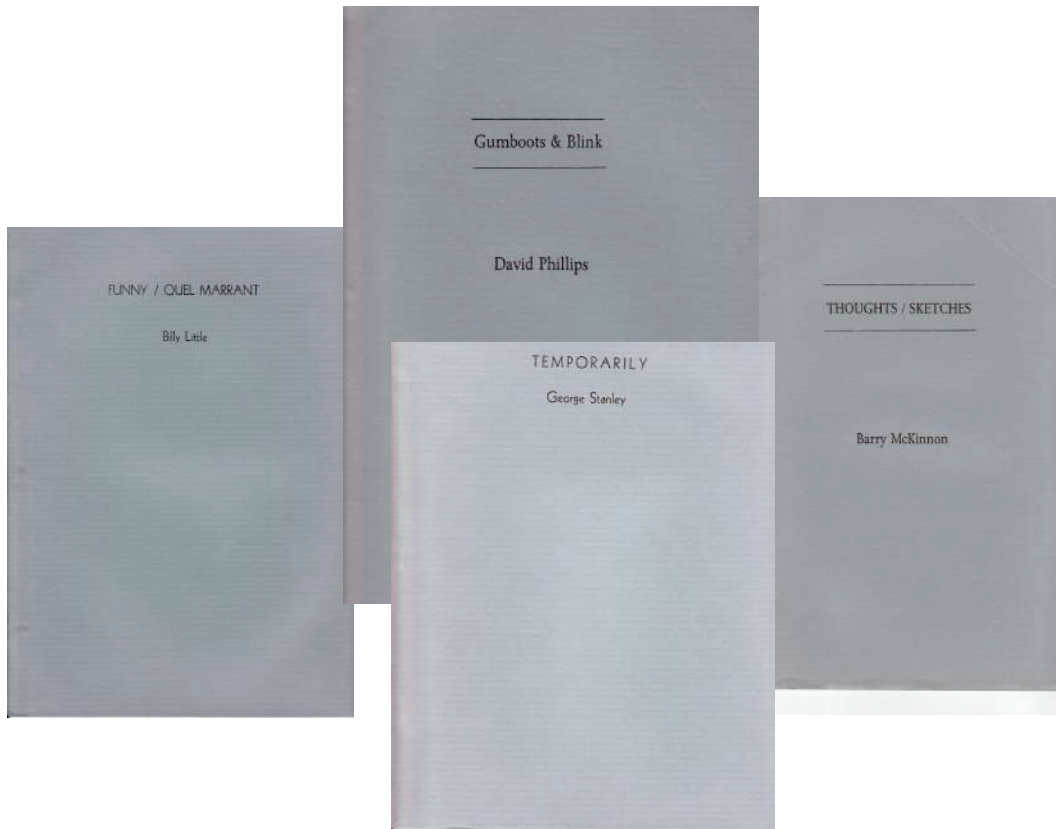
We discussed an overall design format for the Gorse/Tatlow Series and settled for what was simple and manageable: a standard 8 1/2" x 11" text page, typed on my daisy wheel electric typewriter, and then Xeroxed and stapled into editions of 100 copies or so. We always claimed a neat run of 126 copies on the credits page for precious, if not slightly pretentious/satirical reasons, so that 26 *copies* could be *signed, lettered or numbered by the authors*. Very few ever were. I letterpressed the covers on 11" x 17" cover stock (folded in the centre) using an 18 or 24 point Kabel or Garamond for the chapbook title and writer's name.

Gorse Press has remained my press name; it was hastily chosen on a day in 1978, simply based on our long-time address: 1420 Gorse Street. I had no immediate concern for a name with a metaphoric meaning, but I did know, however, that the Gorse bush was a non-existent species in North BC. Later in Scotland, where Gorse abounds, I did see a connection because of its botanical persistence and value: Gorse is rough and prickly as the encyclopedia describes it – and acts as a safe refuge for small nesting birds; it thrives in drought and poor growing areas; it is found in places where many species cannot survive. In my context and activity, poetry and one's imagination could do no better.

Gorse/Tatlow House Press: Series One

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1985



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Phillips, David. *Gumboots and Blink*. Vancouver, Prince George. Tatlow/ Gorse, 1985.

Little, Billy (Zonko). *Funny / Quel Marrant*. Prince George/Vancouver: Tatlow/Gorse Press, 1985.

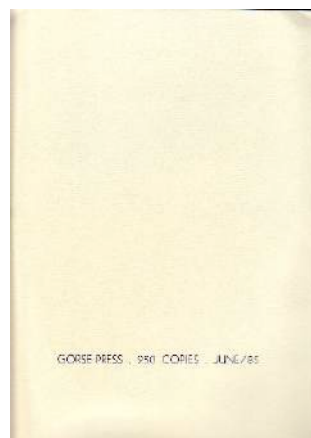
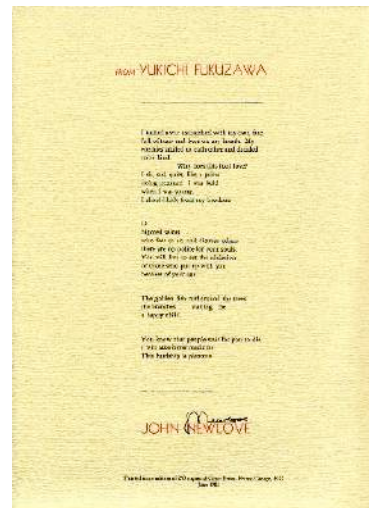
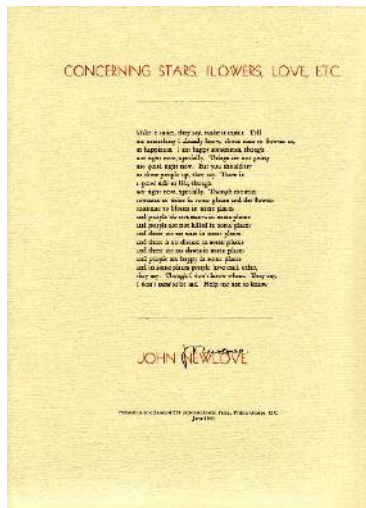
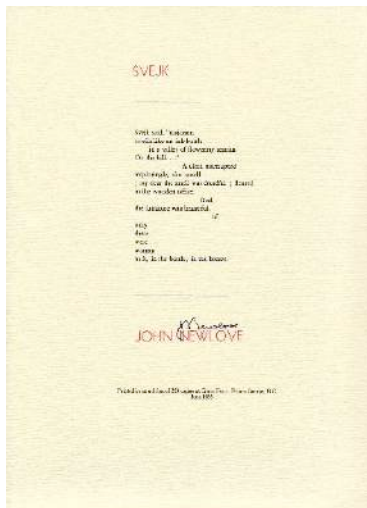
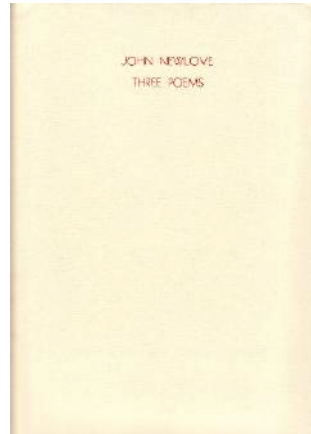
McKinnon, Barry. *Thoughts/Sketches*. Vancouver, Prince George. Tatlow/Gorse, 1985.

Stanley, George. *Temporarily*. Vancouver, Prince George. Tatlow/Gorse 1985.

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As is the case with much of my printing, it was cheaper to buy cover stock in larger quantities, and have the ream frugally cut in a standard size to maximize the “out” stock. For series one, the cover stock most likely came from Coast Paper, a Vancouver company with a huge range of paper colours & weights. Occasionally I’d get a deal on a discontinued or diminished paper stock that I would then use until it ran out. I looked for bargains which in some cases determined much of the overall look/design. For the first four titles, David and I used the same stock 11 x 17” – a gray/blue that tended to fade over the years. Series Two: a pink/to purple, was also prone to fading.

Newlove, John. *Three Poems*, Prince George: Gorse Press, 1985.

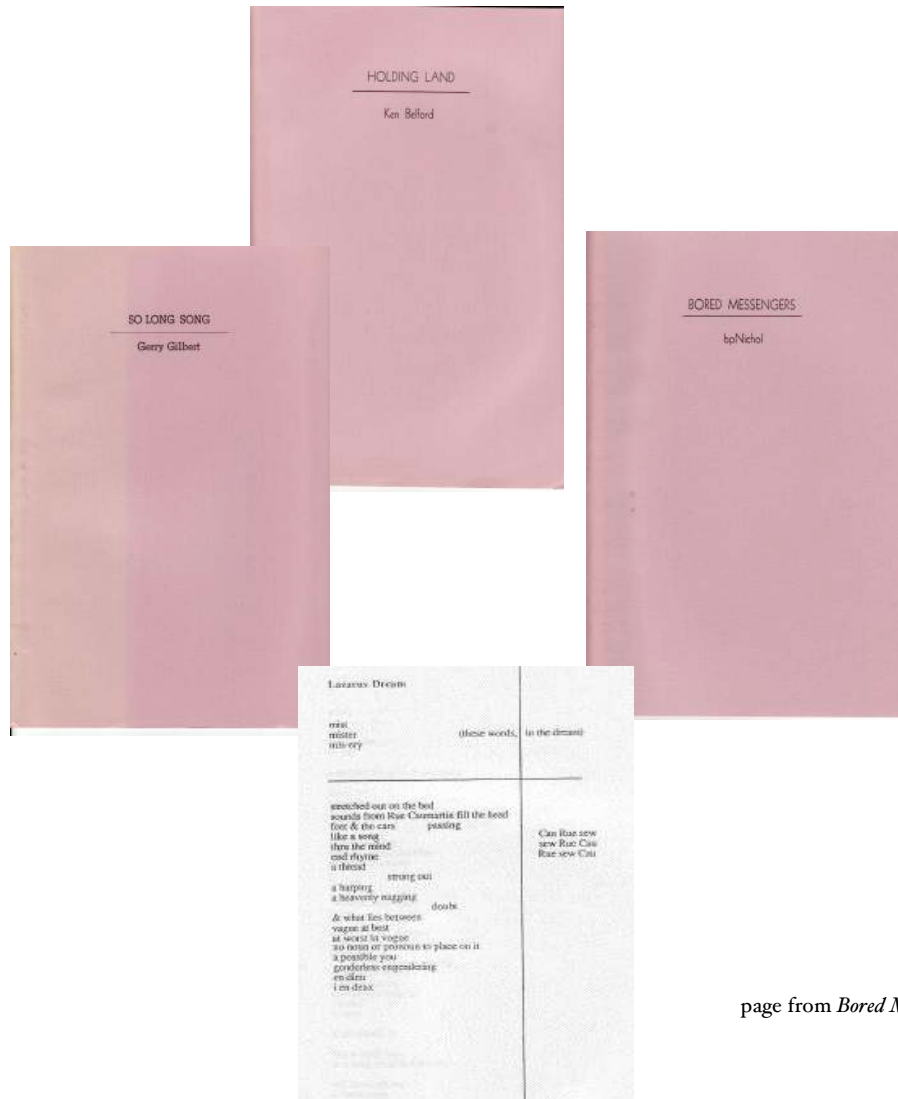


Three poems in a title/folder printed after Newlove's reading in Prince George in 1985. Letterpress. A few sets signed by Newlove. An obvious note of warning to printers and editors: *always* have the text double checked. Although John admits that his original might have "marjoram" as "majoram", I think the spelling error was mine.

Gorse Press: Series Two

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1988



page from *Bored Messengers*,

Belford, Ken. *Holding Land*. Prince George: Gorse Press (Series Two) 1988.

Gilbert, Gerry. *So Long Song*. Prince George: Gorse Press (Series Two) 1988.

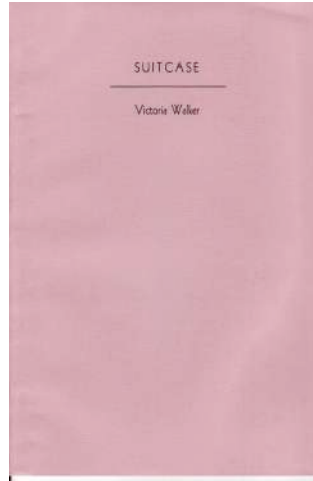
Nichol, bp. *Bored Messengers*. Prince George: Gorse Press (Series Two) 1988.

bp's endnote in *Bored Messengers*: *All the poems in Bored Messengers are taken from The Martyrology Bo(o)ks 7 (VII). The title of this collection is taken from Susan Musgrave's review of the first edition of The Martyrology Books 1 & 2: "the words hang on the page like bored messengers".*

Gorse Press: Series Three

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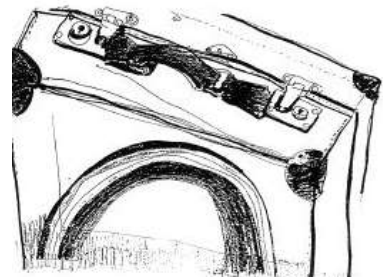
1989



Walker, Victoria. *Suitcase*: Prince George: Gorse Press (Series Three), 1989.

*Suitcase*, I believe, is the first non-trade publication ever to win The Dorothy Livesay Award for Poetry at the annual B.C. Book Awards. Most winning titles are trade-published with Canada Council/BC Arts Council subsidies and distributed thru commercial channels. Gorse Press is not part of the grant system, and distribution is private and limited - but nevertheless this title caught the judge's eyes, and supports the slim notion that a small press chapbook can sneak in to compete with bigger boys. *Suitcase* is 30 pages - a xeroxed text that includes drawings by Victoria Walker. Once Victoria won, interest was piqued and I began to get orders; I printed a second edition of 100 copies. Note: The word *Series* implies a sequence of more than one title. *Suitcase*, however, was a series of one, and likewise, the case with some of the single chapbooks that follow. Below: *Suitcase* Credits Page

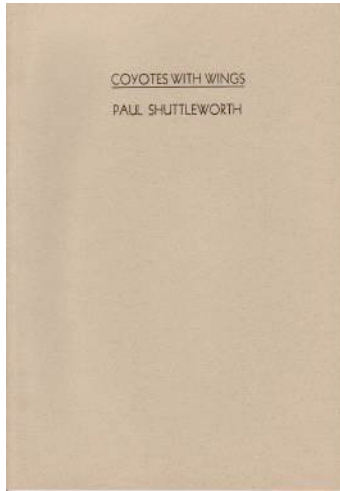
GORSE PRESS  
Series Three, 1989  
Copyright Victoria Walker 1989  
Drawings by Victoria Walker (Margross)  
Printed in imitation of 120 copies



**Gorse Press: Series Four**

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**1990**



Shuttleworth, Paul. *Coyotes with Wings*. Prince George: Gorse Press (Series Four), 1990.

For more detail on Shuttleworth see CWS Chronicle

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from *Coyotes with Wings*

THE GUY LOOKS AT HER. SHE LOOKS BACK. HE GRABS HIS PECKER, SAYS, WANNA DO SOME BLOW? HE STROKES A STATUE IN THE LIVINGROOM, SAYS IT NEVER TALKS BACK, AND THEN HE SLAPS IT. SHE FOLLOWS HIM INTO THE BATHROOM. THE ROOM THEY LEFT HAS 100 PICS OF MARILYN MONROE AND ONE POSTER OF A FACE-OF-THE-80'S (OUR HOST'S GIRL) WHO SAYS, WE COULD HAVE GONE TO PARIS LAST SUMMER.

A post card of Peru

(You skinned my heart is the song I'm writing today)

She has poplar eyes

(The earth is bleeding)

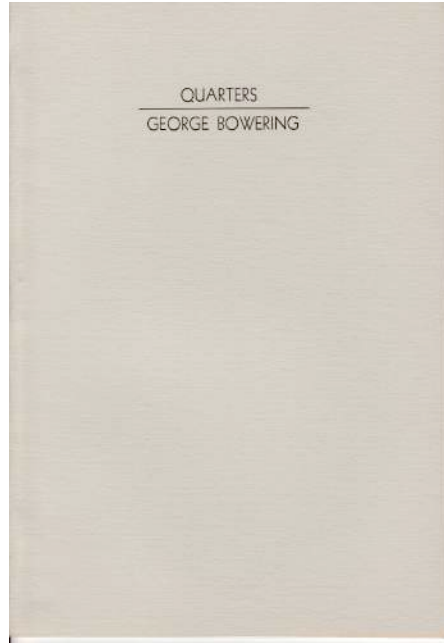
It rains then with a whip sound



Gorse Press: Series Five

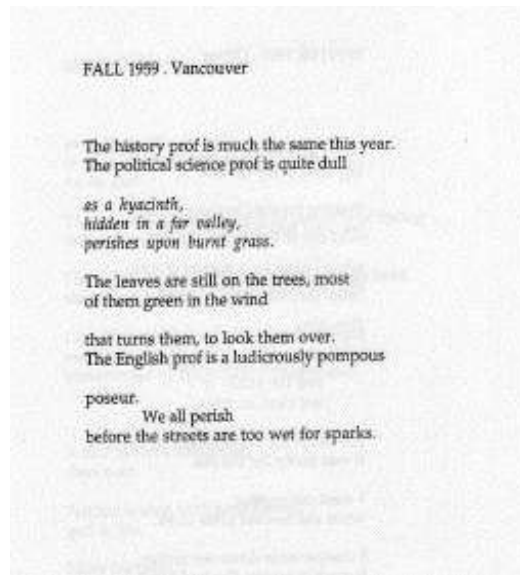
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1991



Bowering, George. *Quarters*. Prince George: Gorse Press, (Series Five), 1991.

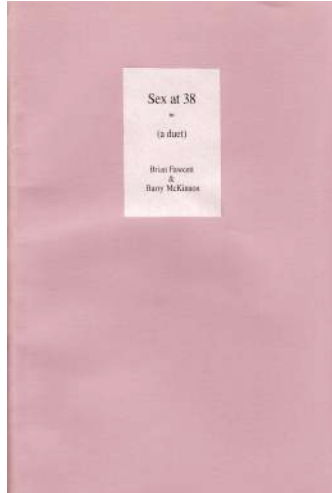
*Winner of the bp Nichol chap book award 1991.*



Gorse Press: Series Five

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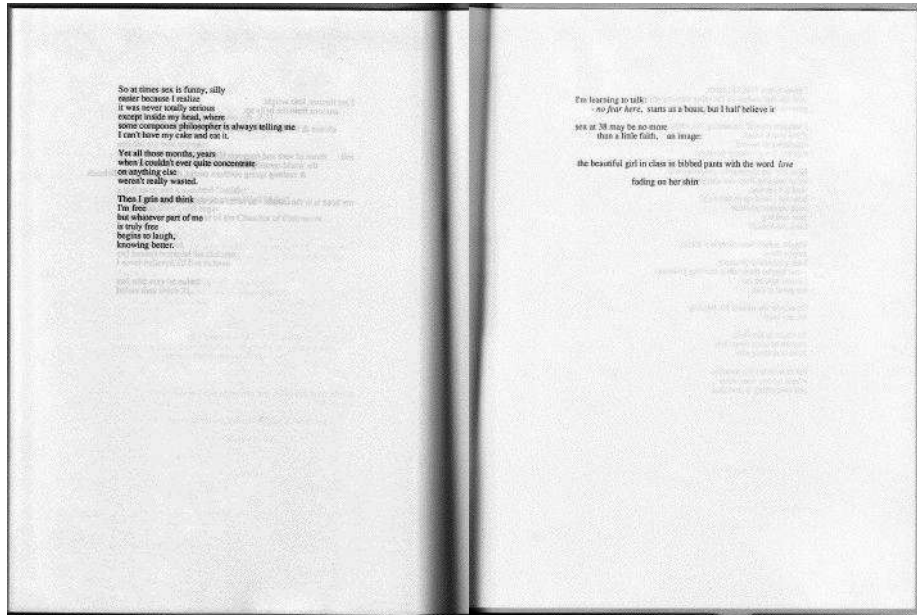
1993



Fawcett, Brian, & Barry McKinnon. *Sex at 38*. Prince George: Gorse press, (series five), 1993.

*Sex at 38* barely exists. I think I printed 13 copies or so and then the printing project got delayed for a reason I can't remember. This collaboration – as with other *Sex at ...* collaborations – occurred every so often with humorous intents, (see CWS chronicle) but also with the seriousness that such a large “subject” requires. What follows the text page below is an introduction to an unpublished anthology compiled by rob mclennan and myself for Chaudiere books called *Collected Sex*. It gives a bit of the history and the *Sex at ...* scope and intentions.

Fawcett/McKinnon page from *Sex at 38*



## Introduction to Collected Sex

The poet Brian Fawcett in our many talks since we met in 1970 always pose and provokes the large questions he believes a poet needs to ask. He once said that the poem was the one place where the poet could *let all of the burners go* in his or her pursuit of truth and beauty. We've also agreed that the poet lives in a context of political, economic, social and historical dimensions – realities & insinuations hardly evident in most Canadian magazine verse. Perhaps not so odd, then, that our shared aesthetic and practice of open verse and the long poem would also lead us to add sex as a large “subject” which we could then try to write “about” at some point in our lives. We might have briefly shuddered at the notion of a self-conscious project to direct the poem's event, but instead, I think we laughed like evil twins with a new chemistry set – and eventually embarked on sex at 31. Open sea ahead!

\*

It really began like this: I asked Fawcett: “What is the most difficult thing to write about?” “Sex”! he said.

We were both 31.

\*

If sex is the subject, where to begin? What occasion within the subject's range prompts a poet to write? This may be what the literary snoop wants to know but need not know. The poem becomes evidence of its own detail/energy and in some instances, evidence of the poet's struggle and inability to get to “it”. Sex at 31 was written, if I can remember, in about a week. But I can't forget the intensity of the emotional mess I was in: fear, guilt, and threat of loss – the sexual heat of jealousy. It wasn't a game. It wasn't a subject. It wasn't “writing”. But I knew my life depended on its articulation in poetry. *Sex at 31* was about as close as I could hope to get.

\*

Brian finished his poem in the same year, before we turned 32. He published both poems in *NMFG* (No Money from the Government) – a 100-copy mimeo mail out.

Sex at 31 was now out in the world!

We next decided for some important or arbitrary reason to set a 7-year span before we'd tackle sex so directly as a subject again. Once young men (now in our early 60's) we moved on to Sex at 38, 45, 52, 59, ... poems that became autobiographical reports, & I hope, as well, perceptive measures of age, love, and sex – accounts of where we'd been on the stormy sea.

\*

I confess, I never finished Sex at 45; it's lost somewhere in a file – a few tattered pages of low intensity notes. Sex at 52 is part of a manuscript in process, *In the Millennium*. In the fear of turning 60, I forgot to write Sex at 59, but did write a poem called *Sixty* that moves more so to poetry's other large dimension and preoccupation: *Time*

\*

But sex is still the oldest story in the book.

\*

My thanks to rob mclennan for his research and resuscitation of the *Sex at 31* story (See *Poetics.ca*) and his idea for the *Collected Sex* project as a prompt and invitation for other poets to write *the difficult*.

## Sex at ...

### A Few Other Notes.

At various times and occasions other poets wrote their versions of *Sex at ...* poems. Artie Gold wrote his *Sex at 31* during a visit to Prince George – and as I often did with visiting writers – we printed the poem on my Chandler Price letterpress as a Caledonia Writing Series broadside. I'm not aware of how Margaret Atwood got a copy of Artie's poem, but she included it in her anthology, *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, 1982. Pierre Coupey and I during one of his readings and visits to Prince George went to a party and in one of our humorous and sardonic exchanges, scratched out *Sex at 31* in a matter of minutes on a cigarette pack. The next day we printed the poem as a literary satire – complete with sewn cover, dedication to Wally Stevens, a minimalist non/poem text, a fake press name (Weasel/Throne) & then preciously signed and numbered each copy with a fine pen. We got to laugh all the more!

Brian Fawcett and I, as part of the 7 year cycle agreement, independently wrote *Sex at 38*, but hours before we were to give a double reading at the Western Front in Vancouver, decided to experiment. We shuffled individual stanzas and verses of each poem to form a collaborative duet. At the reading, he would read his page, and then I would read my page. The commingled text worked well: 2 voices – 2 takes on the same subject. I later printed the duet as part of my Gorse Press series. Instead of the usual 126 copy run, I think I ran out of paper, time, or was otherwise waylaid by a demanding circumstance. I have the 3 extant copies on my shelf. Both of these poems, however, were published by Karen Mulhallen, the editor of *Descant*, as part of the *Male Desire* issue (Fall 1988).

The Peck's bad boy of Can Lit George Bowering, reversed the title & wrote a very funny satire: *38 at Sex*. A few years ago, George Stanley wrote the erotic *Sex at 62*.

This is to say that the various sequences Brian and I wrote exist as serious writing, but that we also had fun with the collaborations and the overall evolution of the project. We might now admit that none of writing is really about sex at all – in the sense of D.H. Lawrence or Henry Miller's graphic and literal accounts, but rather writing as a temporal/corporeal inventory of one's complex relationship to the other as sexual being – and what that being inspires.

FOR WALLY STEVENS / SEX AT 31: Pierre Coupey & Barry McKinnon

Only the awkwardness remains – I'm almost happy.

This is the most depressing poem in the world.

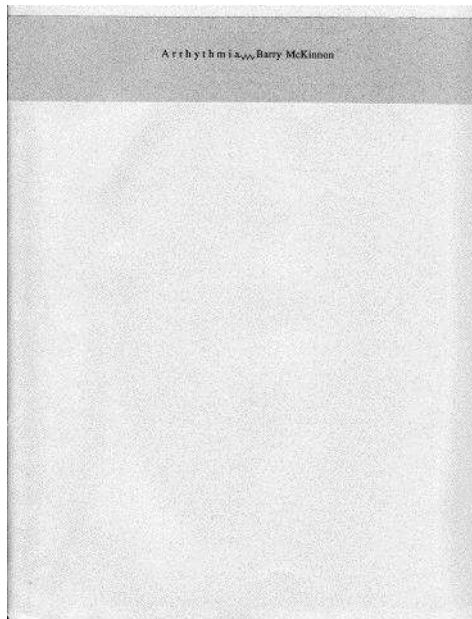
June 4 1977∞ Printed in an edition of 50 copes,  
26 which are lettered & signed by the Other.  
Weasel / Throne Press, Prince George. Letter **A**



Gorse Press

\*

1994



McKinnon, Barry. *Arrhythmia*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 1994.

*Arrhythmia*: Winner of the bp Nichol Chapbook Award 1994 for *the best poetry chapbook in English in Canada in 1994*.

**A note on the composition:** *Arrhythmia* was written during several months when I had the sensation of an immediate, impending, imminent, and early death. No better context for a serious poem! In reality this sensation that I had self-diagnosed as anxiety and depression, despite the absence of any external stressors or obvious sources, turned out to be an irregular heart beat: *Arrhythmia!* What's curious is that the physical /medical description does not account for what I had been experiencing psychologically and existentially. Each verse and stanza during the writing – I was sometimes out of breath with my eyes closed – contained lots of unexpected memory, daily routines I clung to, and observations, reflections, jagged admissions, regrets and laments within this disturbing arrhythmic perspective. At the point of the final diagnosis and doctor's assurance that I wasn't going to die from it, the poem found its end:

*knowing is paradise / a void to emptiness to the self that beats.*

**A note on the design:** The darker gray strip the contains the title and wraps around the top of the cover is the same width as an electro cardiogram strip. The symbol that separates the verses is a jagged line that resembles a heart-rate reading. Not being too obvious, these details give a bit of inside design humour by using the elements at hand.

**A Ten Year Gap**

## The CWS / Gorse Press Circumstance

\*

There is a large gap in my press activity between *Arrhythmia* 1994 and *Bolivia / Peru* printed in 2003. For ten years the little press went dormant. There are several reasons.

I've never been able to completely come to terms with the various antithetical forces that I've encountered as a poet, teacher, printer and cultural worker. In the early 90's I donated a complete set of the CWS items to UNBC and was audited by the Federal Tax Department. As anyone who donates literary archives will know, university libraries issue tax receipts based on the archive's assessed value. The donor gets a "tax break" of, in my case, about 1/3 of the appraised amount. I was called by an agent in Surrey who opened the conversation by saying: "You're not exactly Stephen King are you!" I began to shake, and continued shaking for several months to come, though admitted at the time that I was *better* than Stephen King! Basically the implication – and not a subtle one – was that I was in collusion with the appraiser, the university – and that my "non profit" press activity, and activity as a writer with a meager income, and office deductions/expenses, were illegitimate. The amount I received as a "tax break" I'm sure, did not add up to the expense the tax agents went to to get it back. One phone call that sticks out - and there were many at odd times of the day and night - came from a real-estate appraiser who was hired by the tax department for a week to do literary detective work. He eventually backed off because the librarians at SFU and UBC – bless them for coming to my defense – assured him that I *was* a writer and that the archive *was* legitimate and of cultural value and that the appraisal *was* accurate. The last call from a senior supervisor many months later was to say that their investigation had ceased and that the case against me was dropped.

In the late 1990's I was again audited after I donated my papers and manuscripts to UNBC and had to hire a wonderfully smart young accountant to sort the unbelievable complexity of cultural donation terms and conditions and present an argument in my defense. The Vancouver accountant who originally prepared my return - a supposed genius for artists seeking the best tax break – abandoned me shortly into the audit process. When I visited the university president to ask for help, he suggested I get a bank loan to pay back my return and reapply once the universities cultural/charitable designation mess got straightened out. I was about ready to phone the *Globe and Mail* for a picture of me unloading my boxes from the archive shelves and into my 81 Dodge truck when my accountant Allison got the good news that her detailed analysis satisfied the tax department, and that the donation was legitimate & properly appraised. The second audit dropped!

My point? The audits discouraged me: it was a harassing experience I negatively associated with what I thought, positive literary work. My advice? As the examining doctor says to Marlow in *Heart of Darkness: du calme, du calme. Monsieur*. Patience is a kind of weapon. And if you choose to fight in these matters, take it beyond the threats of the minions and go as high as you can.

Also, during this period I wasn't writing much. It wasn't until the late nineties that I started what was to become a 13 part series *In the Millennium*. As well, college work during this period of absence was as demanding as ever and I might have decided to shift interests – our jazz quartet was active - & to take what I thought might be a "short break" from printing that within the nature of *time's winged chariot*, rapidly becomes ten years. Nevertheless, in 2003 after a trip to Bolivia and Peru, I wrote the poem and had design ideas that got me back to the MAC and the need to self-publish again.

Gorse Press

\*

2003



McKinnon, Barry. *Bolivia / Peru*. Gorse Press: Prince George, 2003.

*Winner of the bp Nichol Chapbook Award for poetry, 2004.*

☐ afterword:

*Bolivia/Peru* is a chronological assemblage of journal notes, thots, splices, poems, questions & reflections inspired by a 5-week trip to South America.

I think we're moving into a new & necessary time for poetry: the poem has to resemble the nature of the various & fractured realities it addresses without presumption, and be wary even of the emotions & thots & forms & devices that promote it.

In *Bolivia/Peru* I've had to struggle with sentimentalities, notions & slants from a North American perspective that do not work or address the larger task of what I think the poem must reveal. In South America I was in a complex without knowing the histopoliticosocio, and therefore entered naked/naive to its experience - perhaps the only way to risk any world's range of pleasures/dangers, and in this weight to thankfully and humbly survive it - to know a little more.

In the Bolivian and Peruvian countryside houses and huts are built with bricks of mud that slowly dissolve in the weather. In this way I want the poem to stand, be habitable, and yet show dissolving forces. My attempt to impose an architecture, however crude, is part of the struggle and pleasure of the writing.

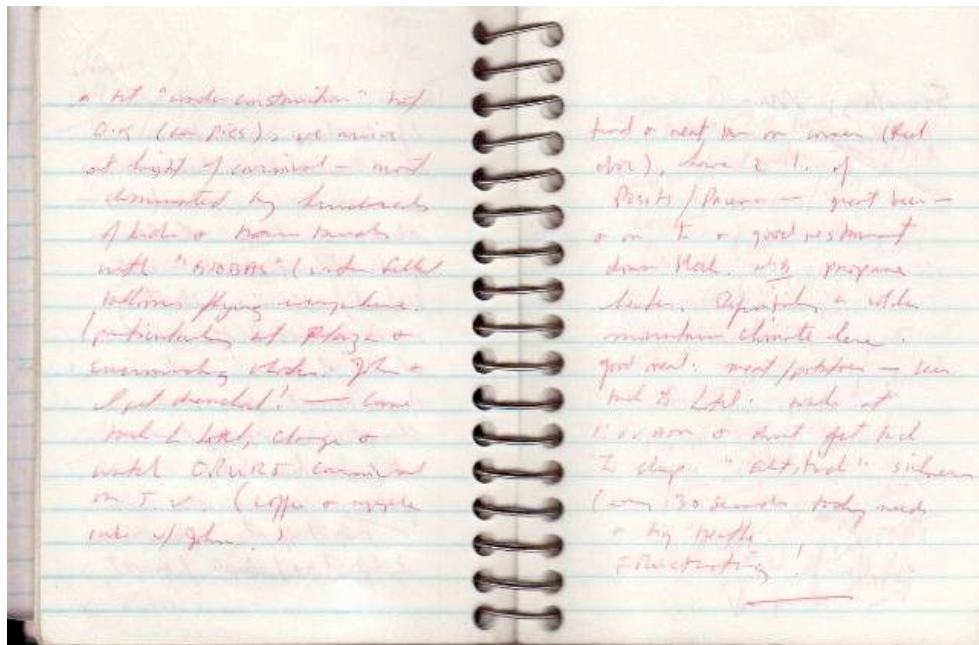
☐ Dedication:

*This poem is for Viv Lougheed, John Harris, & Joy - travelers/companions & for those we met along the way, and for the Bolivian lady who sd to us one day: Que le vaya bien - go well. As it was, we went and went well.*

☐ assemblage notes: Journal notes written in Bolivia & Peru from Feb 7 to Mar 11, 2003.

Journal entries that appear in this text - sections in italics - are transcribed as originally jotted.

Text Assemblage: April - July 2003 in Prince George/Tumbler Ridge, B.C.

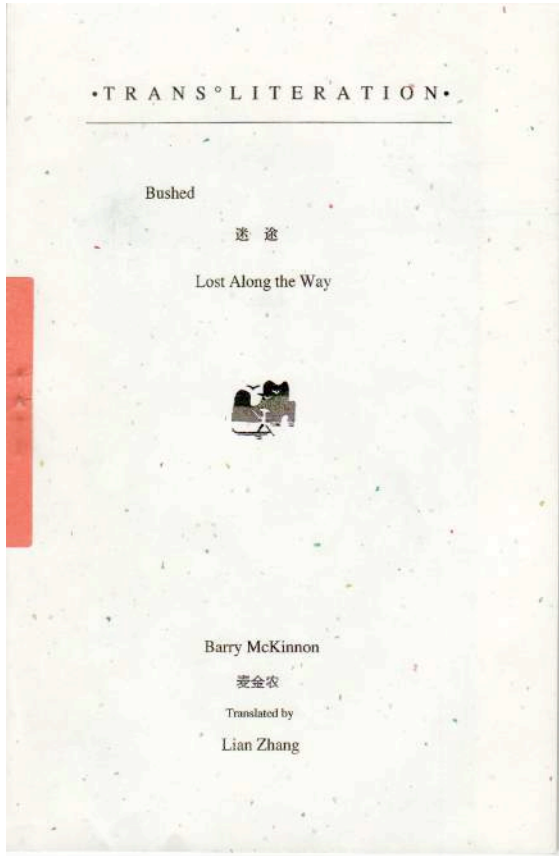


Page from the *Bolivia/Peru Journal*:

Various pages of these journal notes and scribbles are placed as holographs and act as visual breaks that accompany the prose sections in the poem



Transliteration: Gorse Press, 2003.



麦金农

迷途

我正在大雪覆盖的荒漠上  
每条小径都是平等选择通向远方  
因为每个方向和放眼所见都是一样

如果这里有一些木棒  
你就留下来，建造一间住房  
如果这里有一棵树生长  
你就爬上树去朝远方眺望  
如果你有火柴，风也不扬  
你就燃烧这棵树来暖暖身上

真有这样的情况  
爱情不将任何意义附上  
天空多么美丽空旷  
在这里不可能沉思冥想  
如果你能够放声歌唱  
那歌声定将传遍四面八方

### Bushed

I am in a desert  
of snow. each way  
to go, presents an equal  
choice, since the directions, &  
what the eye sees is the same

if there were some sticks, you would  
stay & build a house, or  
a tree would give a place to climb  
for perspective. if you had a match, when  
the wind didn't blow, you  
would burn the tree for warmth, if  
the wind didn't blow & you had a match

there is this situation where love  
would mean nothing. the sky is  
possibly beautiful, yet the speculation  
is impossible, & if you could sing, the song  
is all that would go anywhere

## Lost Along the Way

I am in a deserted wilderness covered with snow  
every road is an equal choice towards the distance  
because whatever you can see, as far as your eyes can see  
in every direction, is the same

If there are some sticks  
you will stay and build a house  
if there is a tree growing  
you will climb to the top and look into the distance  
if you have matches and there's no wind  
you will burn this tree to warm your body

So this can be true: love has no attached meaning  
the sky is so beautiful and spacious  
and here it's impossible to be silent and thoughtful  
if you can let your voice go to sing as loud as you can  
then your song will be carried to every corner of the world.

---

巴里·麦金农 (Barry Mckinnon, 1944— )  
生平事迹待考。这是一首具有现代派特色的抒情诗  
所描写情景的时间地点不明确，诗人的感情也没  
在诗中得到直接的表露，他只是用象征、暗示的  
法去引起读者的联想和感受，委婉曲折地传达了  
己的思想：即使是处于困境中，也不要灰心丧气，  
努力创造条件、发扬乐观精神，去战胜逆境带来  
艰难和挫折，开拓美好的未来。



### His biography is unknown.

This is a lyric poem in a modern style. It's not clear where and when the poem is written and the poet's own feeling is not directly expressed in the poem. He uses only symbolism and suggestion to help the reader make associations and feel the experience.

He indirectly expresses his own idea: *Even if you are in a very difficult situation or are trapped you shouldn't be discouraged and lose heart. You should try to create positive situations and be optimistic to defeat all the difficulties and twists brought by adversity, and open up a beautiful future.*

Lian Zhang's note: The sound equivalents for "McKinnon" in Chinese, mean, in this order:

巴里·麦金农

*Wheat / Gold / Peasant*

### Transliteration: Author's Note

Sometime in the early 90's I got a letter from a professor at Sichuan University describing his literary project: to select Canadian poems for a Chinese anthology.

He found my poem “Bushed” in Margaret Atwood’s anthology *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* and wanted permission to reprint it for his proposed *Selected Canadian Lyrics*. I sent off a quick note to say yes and forgot about it.

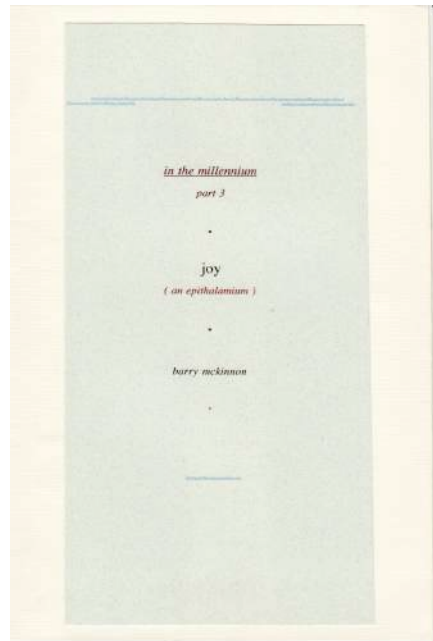
In 1995 I got a copy of the book and curiously searched through its 190 pages to see what my poem looked like graphed in Chinese. I couldn’t understand a word, but the overall company of poets felt good: George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, John Newlove, Margaret Avison, Al Purdy – 33 Canadian writers, each with a short poem translated for millions of Chinese readers.

Later, chatting with the writer Calvin Wharton in Vancouver, I mentioned the anthology and that I was curious to hear what “Bushed” was saying in Chinese. Calvin offered to ask his partner Lian Zhang to do a translation from the Chinese ideograms (*without, we agreed, letting her see my original poem in English*). Lian agreed to this and translated the Chinese version of “Bushed” into “Lost Along the Way” (and also included a translation of the Chinese translator’s notes about my “unknown biography” and “his idea”).

I’m moved and cheered by Lian’s transliteration from “Bushed’s” dark mood to something more sanguine – Such delight at the surprise of the borderless light poetry looks for / the beauty it finds.

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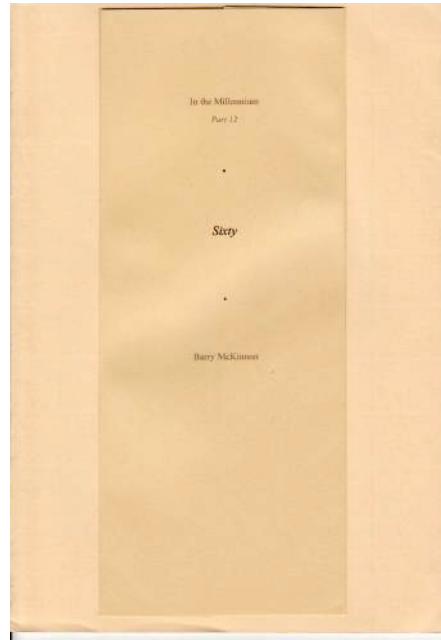
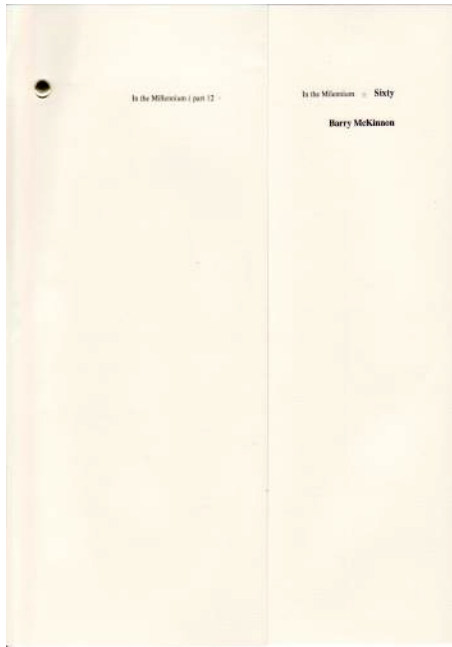
McKinnon, Barry. *in the millennium part 3 • joy (an epithalamium)*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2003



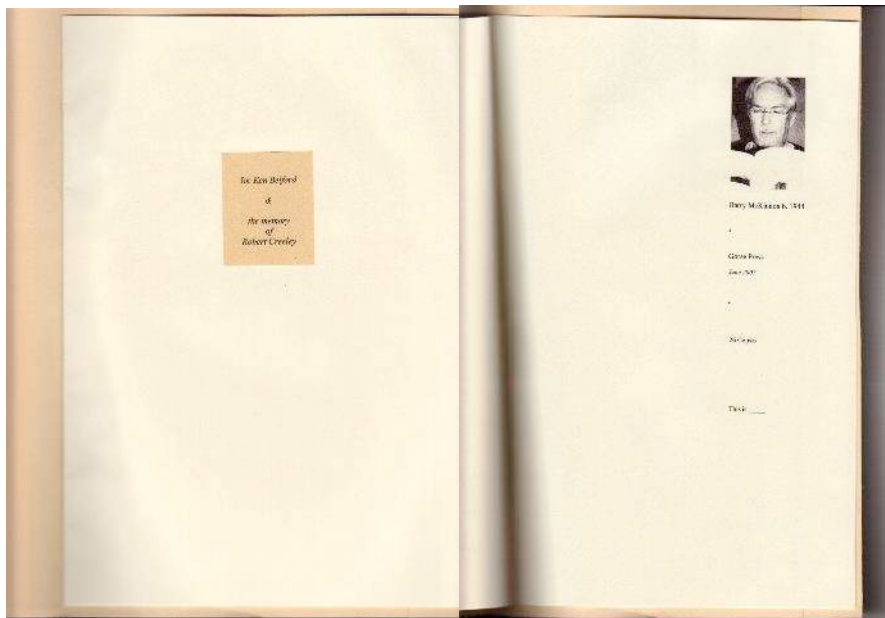
**Gorse Press**

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**2005**



McKinnon, Barry. *in the millennium (part 12 • sixty)*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2005. Reprinted in 2007.

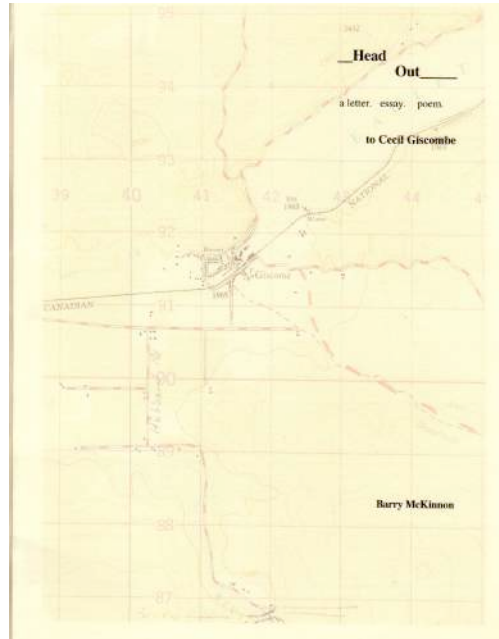


for the memory of Robert Creeley

Gorse Press

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2007



McKinnon, Barry. *Head Out: a letter. essay. poem to Cecil Giscombe*. Prince George, Tumbler Ridge: Gorse Press, 2007.

**Head Out** \_\_\_\_\_

a letter. essay. poem

to Cecil Giscombe

**Preface:**

My friend the American poet Cecil Giscombe and I took part in the *Philly Talks # 18: a Dialogue with Contemporary Poets*, in the Rosza Centre at the University of Calgary on Feb. 2nd, 2000, at 7:30 p.m. The reading, talk and discussion took place with a live audience (and an audio web cast feed for those who wanted to listen and ask questions live via the *Philly Talks* web connection).

Short weeks before the live event Cecil and I exchanged new writing that became the focus for the *Philly Talks* newsletter web document. This material was accompanied, also, by responses/reviews/reactions to our work by 3 other poets: Wayne Compton, George Elliot Clarke, and Giovanni Singleton.

What follows here is my written response to Cecil Giscombe's e-mails to me prior to the reading: it is a response to Cecil's poems/poetics/& concerns as I see them. In this edition the text has been edited and Joy McKinnon's Giscombe photos added.

I've decided to let *Head Out: a letter, essay, poem to Cecil Giscombe* stand alone as part 5 of a series of poems I'm working on called *In the Millennium*. I do, however, prompt any interested reader of this chapbook to see the full context of *Philly Talks18* - which as a whole consists of the poems, essays, statements, e-mails, queries, and written post responses that arose out of the live web cast discussion. (*The Philly Talks # 18* and *Philly Talks Post Response #18* are at [phillytalks.org](http://phillytalks.org)).

I'm not sure that during the talk/discussion part of the event Cecil & I made any teleological advances - even without the pressure to do so; however, we both agreed the next day of feeling - the word we simultaneously blurted out in laughter - was: *stupid*. When in the range of intelligent, huge, hairy, and difficult questions that we were asked - concerns of place, race, meaning, form, content and the intents of poetry - our answers, or a least mine as I remember them, went out by the seat of my pants. If only had we *more* time to *think!* To say what we *really* mean! To revise the spontaneous inaccuracies *with* felicity! etc. ...

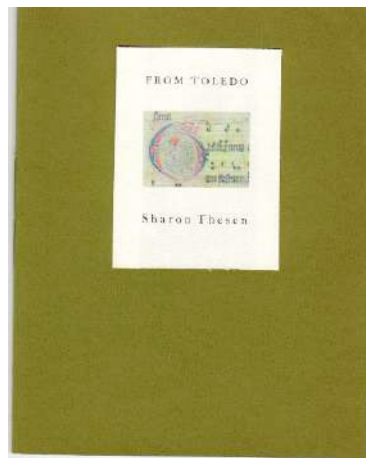
Nevertheless:

never apologize, I once heard it said:

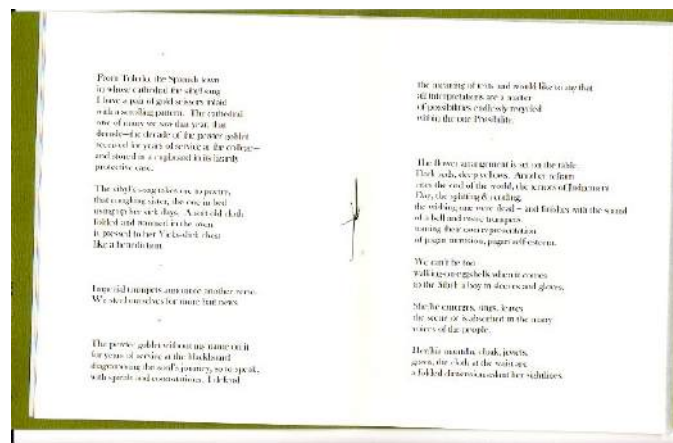
risk to let the voice and writing stand.



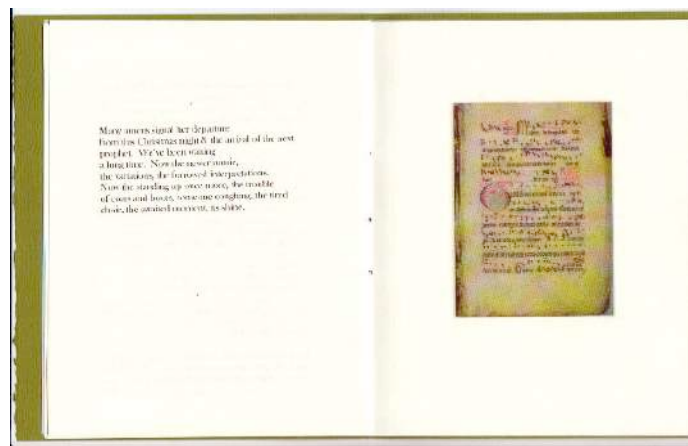
Thesen, Sharon. *From Toledo*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2007.  
Printed in an edition of 50 copies for private distribution, Christmas 2007.



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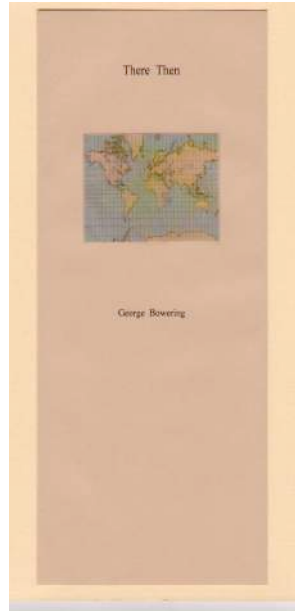


**Gorse Press**

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**2008**

Bowering, George. *There Then*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2008.



McKinnon, Barry. *Surety Disappears*. Prince George: Gorse Press, 2008.

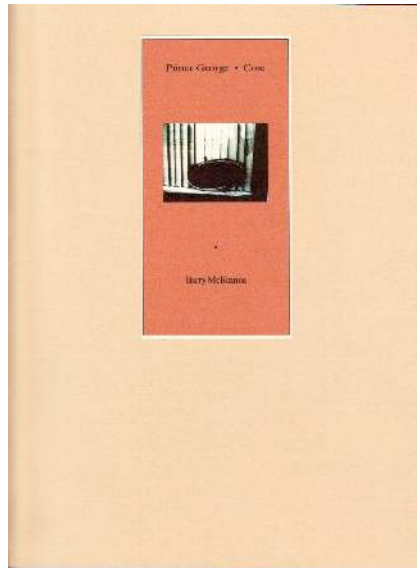
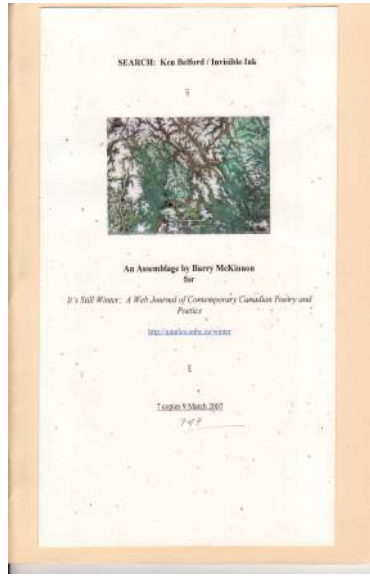
Runner up for *the bp Nichol Chapbook Award 2008*.



Gorse Press 2008 – 2009

a few new titles in the design process

SEARCH: *Ken Belford / Invisible Ink* • *philly talks.org* • *Prince George* • *Core*



# Gorse Press

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## Endnote

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What is evident, without apology, is that Gorse Press in its latter years has been a way for me to self-publish. Even in very limited editions for private distribution, “publishing”, no matter this primal level, completes a process: *to get writing from computer & draft, to its designed pages, and cover - and then to someone’s hand and eye and book shelf. Now* the poem exists, 126 copies on their own. *Now*, the writer can move on.

Much of my pleasure always was and is to see a text inspire and evolve into a chapbook design. Trade publishers, in my experience, tend to exclude the writer from the design process. In the commercial world – oh how we still mistakenly assume a large audience for the poem! – the book cover must grossly jump from a shelf shouting *buy me!* Yet most poets know the courage required to reduce illusion to truth: there is only *that* handful of readers, *the* remainder bin, & *the* lonely fate of a poetry book on *the* library shelf.

When I taught college, I made my students find these books, - the hundreds of small and rare press items & literary ephemera I ordered for the library over the years. Even if they didn’t read more than one of the poems I required them to design as a broadside, I knew the book would have at least one date stamp – and be out in the larger world for at least 2 weeks. Their incredulousness (*Sir, are these really books?!*) increased all the more when I had them do an ABE search, to find, for instance, that bpNichol’s *Bored Messengers* sells for 200 dollars – or that *Elimination Dance* by Michael Ondaatje goes for over 300 dollars.

The rarest items, as we know, ultimately get handled with white gloves in temperature-controlled rooms – having become by someone’s good measure, part of a country’s necessary cultural archive. But until that point, the writer-poet/self publisher/small press person lives in a basement, garage, or study, with a letterpress, Gestetner, or graphics capable computer, a 3 in one printer, rubber collating finger, staplers, sewing needles and thread etc. creating a little but important world that exists entirely within its own intentions, elements, and materials. Often there is a shabby urgency & appearance to the work when compared with the master professional printers and designers who win Alcuin prizes with their “product”, but the small one man/woman press - no matter the flaws, mistakes, and crude demeanor, etc., takes its value by being uncorrupted, and uncompromised. Vanity & self-righteousness?

The small press is *also* an argument – a counter to a slick outer world – a bit of a shout against the odds to say: *I am a poet I am a poet, I stand re affirmed/ashamed.* – Or so it has been with me.

\*

