

Adieu, McSweeney's; hello, Wild West

CODA FOR A COLLECTION

I wrote about McSweeney's and its myriad publishing programs in *Amphora* 153 (Fall 2009). As a collector, one is always pleased to see a subject of your collecting passions prosper. But there can be too much of a good thing for those of us facing space constraints, as most collectors do at some stage.

Two important milestones for my collection were reached in the summer of 2013: I finally obtained a first printing of *McSweeney's* number 1 at a fair price, and issue 100 of the McSweeney's magazine *The Believer* appeared. The psychological effect of these occurrences was coupled with no signs of the press slowing down. If anything output continued to diversify with new areas of interest, often with separate imprints under the McSweeney's banner appearing on a regular basis

At present these imprints include McMullins (books for children), The Collins Library (eccentric public domain titles brought back into print), Voice of Witness (oral histories intended to illuminate human rights crises), Believer Books, a poetry series, a humour series . . . The space crunch (my wife insists that remote storage is not an option) was the key determinant in deciding to look for a new home for the books, magazines, DVDs and one audio cassette.

The challenge in such situations is to find a home for this kind of diverse collection. The sensibility of founder Dave Eggers was reflected in both the authors published and the constant pushing of design boundaries. While it was clear to me that there was significant value in select individual volumes, I also believed there was value in the whole, representing as it did the output of a sometimes quirky, often quixotic, but always interesting contemporary press.

I was lucky that a university with both a focus on contemporary literature and a publishing studies program expressed interest in receiving the collection as a donation. This meant that the collection had a decent chance of remaining

intact and the university, along with adding worthwhile books to its collection, now has some fabulous display items at its disposal.

SERENDIPITY

Novelist Alice Hoffman noted that for her the best reading experience is "falling in love with a book I meet by accident." I have been thinking about what leads us to pick up a particular book at a particular time. Reading author interviews we often learn about what they are reading and what they are planning to read next—"stacked by the bed" seems to be the phrase used. British novelist Nick Hornby has a regular column in *The Believer*, *Stuff I've Been Reading*,¹ which leads off with a list of books bought and books read. (Often the two lists are different, which is certainly the case for me.)

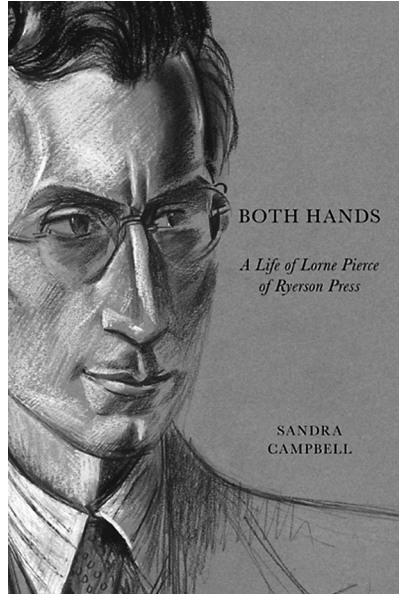
In recent months I have been through a period of reading (and in some instances rereading) novels and non-fiction and watching movies set in the American West. *Where did that come from?* I wondered. The genesis may have been Candace Savage's devastating meditation on (in part) the history of Plains Indians in the Cypress Hills, *A Geography of Blood* (Greystone Books), which I read in fall 2012 as a juror for a non-fiction award. Or was it my purchase of a used copy of a pleasing British paperback edition of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* when I was looking for a book to read on an upcoming flight? This was a book I had read years ago and thought I should revisit and there it was. One doesn't take one's first edition travelling, does one?²

And then there was the brief *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) review of a photography collection, *A Book on the Making of Lonesome Dove*, which prompted an impulse Amazon purchase. I still marvel at being able to buy university press books at 37 percent off the list price. It has prompted purchases I would not have made 15 years ago, knowing I would be paying a significant sum then waiting weeks for the books to arrive. I fully understand and appreciate the value of bookstores as showcases for books one might not otherwise encounter, but I also recognize that the Internet has led me to purchases I never would have made before.

This purchase led to the further purchases

*Both Hands: A Life of Lorne
Pierce of Ryerson Press*

BY SANDRA CAMPBELL
(MCGILL-QUEEN'S, 2013, \$49.95)



of a Blu-ray of the TV movie and a quest for a decent reading copy of Larry McMurtry’s novel. As I browsed new and used bookstores, *Lonesome Dove* proved elusive in any format other than mass-market paperback, which was how I read it first time around. I thought the title would be an ideal candidate for one of those Franklin Mint leather-bound editions. Perhaps McMurtry, well known to be a used bookseller as well as a successful writer, thinks they are tacky. Finally a bookseller friend brought me a well-read copy of the first edition, ending my quest for the reading copy.

Following my *Lonesome Dove* period, I was reading the newly released and very well reviewed western saga *The Son*, by Philipp Meyer (“pulp fiction with a very high I.Q.,” according to the TLS) and watching the director’s cut of *Heaven’s Gate*. This was followed by reading John Williams’s *Butcher’s Crossing*, a book I had purchased several months earlier after reading *Stoner* and which is anything but pulp fiction. This proved to be another devastating look at the settlement of the West, which brought me full circle, back to *A Geography of Blood*.

I’m still not sure why the American West was the focus of my reading for several months. One thing leads to another, as they say, and chance always seems to have a role to play.

1. Recently collected in *Ten Years in the Tub* (McSweeney’s).
2. Writer Bruce Powe told me he had ascertained that only six copies of the Random House first of *Blood Meridian* had been sold in Canada, and he was excited to learn I had one. I explained that I had bought mine at Serendipity Books in Berkeley a few years after publication. I had in fact ordered the book from a local bookseller at the time of publication and it never showed up, perhaps in part explaining the low Canadian sales of this masterwork. Its total North American sales were 1,883 copies, which when you subtract library sales means that there are very few copies potentially available to the collector.

.....
~ Paul Whitney is the former city librarian of Vancouver, British Columbia.

AS YOU WALK west on Queen Street from University Avenue in Toronto, you encounter a building that stands out not just from other buildings on the street but from other buildings in Toronto. It is only five storeys high but it is clad in white terra cotta with book motifs, scribes and readers. If that is not enough to attract your attention. the truck halfway out of the building at the third storey will.

This is a building steeped in the media. Best-known today as the home of Bravo TV and music channel MUCH (formerly MuchMusic), it was previously home to CITY-TV. From 1913 to 1970, however, it was the home of Ryerson Press—its publishing and editorial offices, its printing plant—and of its editor-in-chief, Lorne Pierce.

Ryerson Press was the publishing and printing arm of the Methodist Church. With the formation of the United Church in 1925, Ryerson Press continued in its role for the new church.

Sandra Campbell, in this biography of Lorne Pierce, describes Pierce as a “seminal