

Campanile's "LATTER-DAY EXECRESCENSES | Personators and Signature Imitators."

Clouse briefly explores the reasons for the decline of ornamented typefaces and the changes that fuelled the emergence of a new breed of graphic designer working in an industry that was learning to become more efficient and streamlined. The rise of modern typefaces left a nostalgia for the older, ornamented styles as fine printing developed a life of its own separate from commercial work. Clouse suggests that ornamentation, left behind by commercial foundries, became part of the backlash against "the detrimental effects of industry and commercialization on design."

In this way, the designs remain relevant today, as typographers continue to debate the place of ornament and style. An occasional raid of the old designs often serves to highlight our own contemporary prejudices and aspirations, as lamppost posters announcing the latest indie band's performance. When fame is as much ornamentation as it is actual achievement, the achievements of a past era can highlight in florid style fame's transitory character. Clouse provides an entertaining guide to the historical moment in which MacKellar, Smiths & Jordan's achievements flourished, and then passed on.

REVIEWED BY PETER MITHAM

☞ *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*

Edited by Sue Bradley

(British Library, 2008, £25)

Publishing an oral history of the British book trade in book form is at once curious and yet entirely appropriate, acknowledges editor Sue Bradley in her introduction to *The British Book Trade: An Oral History*. Drawing on from more than 1,600 hours of interviews (now part of the British Library Sound Archive), Bradley has pulled together reflections from over 80 members of the English and Scottish book trade that provide insight into the life, changes and colourful anecdote that distinguished publishing in the U.K. through the 20th century. (Northern Ireland receives no specific attention, however, and interviews with designers and production workers were not yet transcribed and available for inclusion.)

At 300-plus pages, the book could be daunting without Bradley's helpful introduction. Seeking to create a coherent narrative from the diverse source material at her disposal, Bradley has fashioned a text in which speakers' words are part of a verbal tapestry. Interviews are stitched together with short descriptors of the speakers, and the interviewer's questions and comments are set in an unobtrusive italic face that gives centre stage to the reminiscences.

The narrative itself is readable and enjoyable: One discovers first-hand the delights of the stacks in pre-Blitz London (the big Simpkin, Marshall warehouse was destroyed on December 29, 1940, obliterating millions of books and miles of shelving), as well as the social attitudes and connections that saw conscientious objectors sacked and admirers of T.S. Eliot (such as young Anne Walmsley at Faber & Faber) the butt of laughter. The serious business aspects are covered, including a chapter on the ending of the Net Book Agreement in 1995 that opened up pricing in the book market.

Reading the anecdotes, one gets a fuller picture of a world slipping away as universities became enamoured of book history in the late 1990s. Bradley's interviews bring to life the context in which a chain like Waterstones could rise—to the ire of many—post-1995, and the pressures that led to the demise of the venerable Edinburgh bookseller James Thin in 2002. Having seen the current generation of the Black family making the rounds during a visit I made to England's A&C Black in spring 1996, Bradley's sources ring true about the ties of affection and honour, and not just company loyalty, that informed many shops through the transitions of the past century. "Trust, generosity and the ability to entertain" are among the highest-rated values Bradley's subjects note, and this book shares the impact of those values on book industry workers with readers of all stripes.

*The British Book Trade: An Oral History* also positions itself as a contribution to the history of the book now so much in vogue. Though larger multi-volume projects such as *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* and *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* are covering the ground in comprehensive fashion, the interest they are stirring is yielding projects such as the present volume. Although the actual impetus dates as far

back as 1987 with the establishment of National Life Stories, with its mandate to record interviews with a broad cross-section of contemporary society, Bradley recognizes that this effort is one more contribution to a burgeoning field of scholarship.

Fortunately, it is a contribution that is accessible—making available the original sound recordings in such a way as to pique interest in the larger audio collection as well as generating further works that continue to illuminate the colourful world of U.K. book publishing.

The volume also points to the greater appreciation and interest Canadians should take in our own country's book trade professionals. An equally ambitious project seems almost unimaginable here, however, given the constraints on funding. While we are fortunate to have the three-volume *History of the Book in Canada*, Bradley's work? volume? sets an example for enthusiasts who want to capture the flavour, first-person, of Canada's book trade.

REVIEWED BY PETER MITHAM

~ *A Memoir* By Larry McMurtry  
(Simon & Schuster, 2008, \$28)

It is not at all surprising that Larry McMurtry's memoir of his 40-plus years in the book trade would be eagerly awaited by bibliophiles everywhere. After all, he was the author of some 28 novels, one of which, *Lonesome Dove*, won the coveted Pulitzer Prize in 1986. He was also well-known for the successful film adaptation of his third novel, *The Last Picture Show*.

McMurtry had a wealth of personal experience to back up his considerable narrative skill. While studying at Stanford University he became a rare book scout, and during his years living in Houston he managed a bookstore called the Bookman. In 1969 he moved to Washington, D.C., and in 1970 with two partners opened a bookshop in Georgetown which he named Booked Up. In 1988 he opened another Booked Up in Archer City, which is one of the largest single used bookstores in the U.S., carrying somewhere between 400,000 and 450,000 titles.

McMurtry, therefore, is an experienced book man with considerable skill in telling a good story. One might well ask, then, what happened to that

great fund of knowledge and that ability to tell an interesting tale? Readers will certainly not find a well-crafted and satisfying read in Books.

The problem is that this book of 259 pages is chopped up into 109 chapters. I conducted a laborious manual count of the book's chapters and came up with the following numbers:

- chapters of one page or just slightly longer: 53
- chapters of 2 pages or slightly longer: 45
- chapters of 3 pages: 7
- chapters of 4 pages: 1
- chapters of 5 pages: 3

That's more than 183 pages right there. In addition, as one reviewer has already noted, the chronology is not always straightforward but tends to jump back and forth in time.

The result is a very sketchy and fragmented read. McMurtry begins an interesting anecdote, for example, about some part of the book trade, but invariably it fizzles out in an anticlimactic way in a mere page or two. The reader is often left wanting to know more details about a particular story and perhaps even some discussion about the possible significance of an event or events. It is sort of like reading a book of one-liners as opposed to reading a well-crafted humorous short story. One might even go so far as to call reading *Books: A Memoir* an experience—given the bookish theme—of “codex interruptus.”

I did eventually read right through the book for the occasional insight it might offer about the book trade. It certainly didn't take me long given the large number of one- and two-page chapters. My final recommendation is to borrow *Books: A Memoir* from the public library and then try to sample the book in some way. I wouldn't recommend buying a copy, since at least two of my friends after purchasing and dipping into the book decided they did not want to keep it in their personal libraries. They passed both copies along to me to do with as I saw fit.

Anyone want to buy a good used book?

REVIEWED BY RICHARD HOPKINS