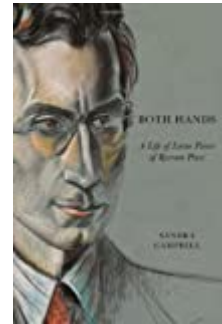


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Sandra Campbell.** *Both Hands: A Life of Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013. Illustrations. 672 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-4116-0.



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**Published on** Jhistory (December, 2013)

**Commissioned by** Heidi Tworek (Harvard)

The culmination of many decades of extensive research, *Both Hands* is much more than a biography of a single individual. In telling the story of Lorne Pierce (1890-1961), who was editor of Ryerson Press from 1920 to 1960, Sandra Campbell also brings large swaths of Canadian cultural history to life, from the small town Ontario Methodism of Pierce's childhood to the web of writers, publishers, and other cultural agents with whom he interacted through his long and influential career. Some 120 pages of notes document Campbell's investigation into personal and professional correspondence, publishers's records, and Pierce's diaries, along with many interviews that she conducted in the 1990s. From this mass of information, Campbell has distilled a compelling narrative of the accomplishments and foibles of a man who did much to shape English Canada's mid-twentieth-century literary culture according to his own principles of aesthetic and national value. As well, her accounts of the editorial conversations and negotiations concerning specific authors and texts provide illuminating insight into the day-to-day workings of the publishing industry.

Central to Pierce's destiny was the driving ambition of his mother, a woman who probably would have become a church leader (if not a university president) had she been born several generations later. Upon the birth

of her only son, Harriet Pierce oriented his upbringing toward the Methodist ministry, inculcating a commitment to social service, acceptance of God's will, and abhorrence of alcohol—as well as a strong sense of artistic value based on the principles of John Ruskin. Bright and obliging but not utterly compliant, the young Pierce negotiated his own way by obtaining his first degree from Queen's University (rather than his parents's choice of the more conventionally Methodist Victoria College at the University of Toronto), where he met his future wife, Edith Chown, niece of the radical feminist and pacifist Alice Chown, whose conversations and correspondence expanded the intellectual vision of both Lorne and Edith. In 1916, shortly after Lorne's ordination, Edith entered the marriage with some trepidation about a lifetime commitment to a consistent overachiever who would earn a total of five university degrees as well as write and/or edit more than twenty volumes concerning Canadian writers, artists, and national identity, while also fulfilling the more than full-time position of editor at English Canada's leading literary and educational publisher. In addition to raising the family's two children, Edith butressed her husband's frequent ill-health (due to chronic lupus) and his growing deafness that became a major obstacle in social and professional communication. If there

is an absence in this book, it is an interior view of Edith. Unlike her husband, who maintained detailed diaries and whose increasing deafness meant that business was more often conducted on paper than via telephone, Edith left few records of her views and experiences as she subdued her considerable intellect into perfecting the management of her family.

While the early trajectory of Pierce's life involved a strong sense of mission, he assumed that the prevailing institution would be the church and that he would perform some form of ministry. This expectation took him from probationary postings in distressingly marginal communities in western Canada to a more fashionable congregation in Ottawa, which he left to join the army Medical Corps in 1917, from which he exited with tuberculosis. Despite having promised Edith that he would never commit her to life in a rural parsonage, he then took a post in an Ontario agricultural parish where his gift for community development, along with his literary and academic interests manifested in both published articles and public lectures, garnered the attention of those involved in the restructuring of the venerable Methodist Book and Publishing House into the newly christened Ryerson Press. The upshot was that in 1920 Pierce accepted the position of literary and educational advisor, soon retitled book editor and literary advisor.

The first to occupy this position, Pierce essentially defined its parameters as he carved out his role. He found that his self-construction as an impassioned cultural nationalist (p. 6) frequently required compromise, sometimes with his own inherited principles and sometimes with his Methodist superiors, who were concerned as much about fiscal solvency as about maintaining traditional values. Writers whose spirituality corresponded with Pierce's own idealism, such as poets Albert Durrant Watson and Marjorie Pickthall, generated little conflict, but the forces of modernism proved more problematic. While Pierce's interest in building Canadian literature inspired his prescience in publishing E. J. Pratt's

first book of poems, *Newfoundland Verse* (1923), he lost Pratt's subsequent work because he could not tolerate the satire on Prohibition in Pratt's second book, *The Witchesâ Brew* (1926). Yet his commitment to publishing Frederick Philip Grove's naturalistic novel, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), seemed at odds with his usual reticence about sexuality, and Campbell speculates that he was drawn to the book's honesty about the harshness of settler life that he had witnessed firsthand as a student minister on the prairies.

Many of Pierce's other projects were invaluable in providing infrastructure for the teaching and support of Canadian literature and history, such as the anthology *Our Canadian Literature* (1922), the Makers of Canadian Literature series, the Ryerson Canadian History Readers, and the enduring Ryerson chapbook series that enabled a number of important poets, such as Anne Marriott, to get into print (along with many more whose work was less remarkable). As well, in the 1920s he began to collect the literary manuscripts and archival materials that now reside at Queen's University as the Edith and Lorne Pierce Collection of Canadiana. While the dramatic upsurge in Canadian literature that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s is often associated with the charismatic and colorful publisher Jack McClelland, who in the 1960s branded his firm of McClelland and Stewart as "the Canadian Publishers," Pierce deserves full recognition for preparing the seedbed that nurtured the cultural boom that flourished after his death in 1961. His commitment to Canada—including the literature of French Canada—gave strong roots to the cultural nationalism that would secure the status of Canadian literary studies in the country's postsecondary system.

In her introduction, Campbell notes that "the biography of a pack-rat workaholic publisher with a finger in every Canadian cultural pie over four decades is a challenge to research and write" (p. 11). She deserves our thanks and congratulations for having met this challenge brilliantly and this book deserves to win prizes.

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**Citation:** Carole Gerson. Review of Campbell, Sandra, *Both Hands: A Life of Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. December, 2013.

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