Books in Review / Comptes rendus

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Carman Cumming. *Sketches from a Young Country: The Images of Grip Magazine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. xiv, [2], 275, [1] pp.; \$55.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8020-0695-7. \$18.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8020-7646-7.

When one looks back at the production of nineteenth-century periodicals in Canada, there are a number of magazines that stand out and reflect the events, social conditions, and controversies of the era. On the one hand these magazines are a mirror of the times. On the other hand, when one takes into account the highly partisan nature of periodical and newspaper publishing during this period, they also reveal much about their proprietors, their views and prejudices. One such magazine was *Grip*, which ran from 1872 to 1894, and, with the exception of a two-year hiatus between 1892 and 1894, was controlled and owned by John Wilson Bengough, one of Canada's greatest cartoonists.

In his assessment of *Grip* and Bengough, Carman Cumming, an adjunct professor of journalism at Carleton University and the author of *Secret Craft: The Journalism of Edward Farrer* (1992), attempts to strike a balance between praise and criticism. The balance is a difficult one to achieve, and it is easy to overstate the case in Bengough's favour, especially when one reads the effusive memoir and other notes left behind by Bengough's brother, Thomas. What impact did Bengough's moral crusades have on the social and political framework of Canada during the late nineteenth century? He championed causes such as temperance, women's suffrage, free trade, Protestantism, and the single tax. Although progressive and reformist in outlook, he was quintessentially Victorian. His cartoons are often patronizing in their depiction of women, Jews, Asians, Native people, and French Canadians. Bengough claimed to be politically impartial when in point of fact, he usually supported the Liberal party and hounded Sir John A. Macdonald. Cumming has discovered that in 1911 Bengough even applied to Sir Wilfrid Laurier for an appointment to a senate seat.

Richly illustrated with over 100 of Bengough's cartoons, *Sketches from a Young Country* analyzes and describes Bengough's career from its inception until his death in 1923. Most of the book naturally focuses on Bengough's

editorship of *Grip*. Chapters are first chronological and then thematic. Chapters dealing with the 1870s and 1880s are followed by others on the press wars, race and creed, the opening of western Canada, the radical times, imperialism and independence, and *Grip*'s social conscience. In particular, the acerbic views of T. Phillips Thompson, the labour advocate and socialist, who edited *Grip* for at least half a year in 1873 and then again in the 1890s, are contrasted with those of Bengough. Other editors and publishers such as George Brown, John Ross Robertson, Billy Maclean, and E.E. Sheppard also make brief appearances in Cumming's narrative.

In his preface Cumming states that very soon all the *Grip* cartoons, including the poems and satires, should be made available on compact disc. At the same time he is critical of Bengough's lapses as a journalist and artist. He claims that Bengough was not a brilliant draftsman and that his artwork was often derivative from other sources. According to Cumming, *Grip* in its early years was banal and shallow. This assessment is difficult to accept in its entirety when one examines Bengough's trenchant illustrations of the Pacific Scandal and Macdonald's subsequent follies. In an effort to neutralize *Grip*'s satire, Macdonald even bought shares in the Grip Printing and Publishing Company through a third party. In spite of Bengough's prolific output, Cumming finds Bengough's later illustrations frequently repetitive and his literary work mediocre. Notwithstanding Bengough's apparent biases, Cumming maintains that *Grip* is a valuable and lasting source of Canadian history for the nineteenth century.

Although it is the wont of reviewers to complain when their own research has been neglected by an author, it seems to me a shame nonetheless that Cumming has not drawn upon my own research into the Bengough family's work in publishing (see *Papers/Cahiers* 27 (1988): 12-37). Cumming appears to be unaware of the extent of *Grip*'s wide circulation in the 1880s. In 1886 the Grip Printing and Publishing Company boasted that it was the largest book and job printing house in Canada. Cumming recounts that the company acquired a printing contract with the Ontario government in the mid-1880s. Despite the fact that he has unearthed new material in the Aemilius Irving papers at the Archives of Ontario on the problems associated with this contract, in the final analysis Cumming reports disappointingly that the documents there are inconclusive.

Cumming's book is well researched and carefully written. He concludes by saying that a great deal of ambiguity remains as to Bengough's real impact. Even so, Cumming believes that Bengough "is wonderfully authentic in showing what was going on in the minds of Ontario's Christian, liberal, reformist, Anglo-Protestant dominant class" (237).

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