

SOME COMMENTS ON A NON-REVIEW

Professor Stevenson's review of *Profiles of Canadian Educators** comes very close to being a non-review because the criticisms contained therein are lacking in terms of the rigor required of an objective appraisal. I shall support this statement with several examples such as a failure to provide evidence, faulty labelling, and generalizing, and I will show that Mr. Stevenson has scored only one point in his piece and that pertaining to a technical error.

At the outset of the "review," we encounter a statement that proves to be more than paradoxical. Professor Stevenson belittles a biographic approach to Canadian educational history on the basis that some scholars evidently hold views opposing this practice. No particular names are cited, however, neither are we told just what the nature of that opposition might be. Near the end of the selection we are told by Professor Stevenson that if students are to be informed about Canadian educators it would be better to do so through the yet unpublished *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Unfortunately, we do not know who the authors of this work are nor what their qualifications will boast, but more to the point is the assumption that waiting is better than researching and writing. One wonders just how much Canadian content would be forthcoming if all authors took this approach. And this has to be added to the observation that Mr. Stevenson appears to have softened his mind a little at the end of the writing toward the idea of having students learn about Canadian educators. Personally, as a Canadian, I am happy to see at least this concession on his part.

The point about failing to provide evidence finds examples in several instances, the first having to do with reference to the chapter about John G. Althouse. Professor Stevenson implies that the validity of the entire chapter is questionable because of what he cites as errors in footnoting. His two examples are really mislabelled as I shall later demonstrate, but the point of immediate concern has to do with the implication that the research on Dr. Althouse is of no merit simply because of a misunderstanding about the nature of footnoting. Research cannot normally be discounted on the basis of printing mistakes even though one would admit that this *might* be justifiable if the error were widespread.

A second example of failure to support adequately claims made occurs when Professor Stevenson picks out a few chapters in *Profiles* and labels

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them as acceptable scholarship. I have no quarrel with this selection except that the reader is not told on what grounds these are acceptable and the others not. What criteria does Stevenson employ in his discrimination? I was mildly chagrined to note that my chapter on John McDougall was *not* included in the list of commendable chapters since I had taken time to check the account for accuracy and implication with local historians and with the McDougall family. I can only hope that the acceptability of writing about Canadians is not determined solely on the grounds of Professor Stevenson's unknown criteria. Chapters not sorted out for attack are simply dismissed with the statement that "the general assessment of the collection must remain negative." This is a direct quote, not a paraphrase! In making these statements Professor Stevenson appears to be following his own negative orientation clearly stated at the outset; "this book merits only an essentially negative eulogy. . . ." It would be my point that an objective review should rarely, if ever, take on the characteristics of a eulogy, negative or positive.

The central point of this writing pertains to Stevenson's attempt to belittle the work I accomplished on Dr. John G. Althouse, and it is here that his "review" falls into the trap of mislabelling. The issue at stake is the difference between footnoting and paraphrasing. In my own training, and I have attempted to pass this on to my students, footnoting is intended to identify sources whether these are quoted directly or paraphrased. In the Althouse chapter both occur. In referring to Stevenson's own work it was my intention to paraphrase, which means changing (even slightly) the original text, omitting quotation marks, yet giving full credit. This is entirely different from plagiarism in which *no* credit to a source is given whatsoever. The paraphrasing technique is acceptable when even a single word is changed in a quotation (allowing a writer more freedom with the quotation), and quotation marks must be omitted when this is done. However, credit is still given to the original source. I would be interested in obtaining further information about Professor Stevenson's interpretation of this practice. At the same time, I will admit that the footnote number seven is missing from the text itself, but its inclusion in the chapter listing of sources surely clears me from any wrong intent implied by the reviewer. I think it should also be stated that a careful reading of the Althouse chapter will show that it contains all of the positive points about Althouse mentioned by Professor Stevenson.

Professor Stevenson scores a single point with reference to the chapter dealing with Egerton Ryerson, but he will likely not be comforted by the fact that the original manuscript *does* indeed contain reference to the sources he cited, and which should have been included in that chapter. An explanation of the omission of the nine footnotes is available, of course, but this will probably not save the collection from those who would condemn it in any event. When the condemnation is in the form of generalizations about an honest attempt to write Canadian educational history, however, it is expected that scholars will look beyond these and concentrate on the work itself. Certainly the manner in which I have found students receptive to this book supports the claim that it fills a vital need in our field. I have some serious doubts about the contention made by Stevenson that the technical errors in *Profiles* will be reproduced in student essays and papers; after all, when we teach students we demonstrate to them the uses of proper English, and we do not need to fear that an occasional printing error will instigate an entire epidemic. To do so would be to fear the exception rather than the rule, and would imply a form of negative education at its worst.

Profiles of Canadian Educators comprises a collection of biographies of Canadians who delved positively into the potential of this country and earned the due respect the book gives them. It is hoped that this message will continue to be perpetuated by Canadian educators as they hold these exemplars before our coming generations.

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