

## **An eminent scholar of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cartoon – Two new books by Richard Scully**

Richard Scully, *Comic empires: Imperialism in Cartoons, Caricature, and Satirical Art*, Manchester 2020. £80.00

Richard Scully, *Eminent Victorian Cartoonists*, 3 volumes, London 2018. £36.00

Richard Scully, assistant professor at the University of New England, Australia, has a long-established reputation of being one of the most productive researchers in the field of cartoon studies. In several articles, Scully has especially shown his expertise on the cartoon history of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic, among others.<sup>1</sup> He has now edited “Comic empires: Imperialism in Cartoons, Caricature, and Satirical Art“.

In his introduction to the book Scully writes: „In recent years, the cultural turn in the history of empire and imperialism has shed much new light on how imperialism and subject populations functioned. Yet despite ample attention being given to the role played by commercial advertising, print capitalism, travel and tourism, and other cultural forms, there has been little analysis of the key function of cartoons, satirical art, and caricature in sustaining, and challenging, imperial systems.“ Scully states that so far „there exists no thorough, scholarly, interrogation of the relationship between cartoons and empire“<sup>2</sup> - the book’s laudable aim is to fill this considerable research gap.

For a long time, Scully has shown himself to be a champion for the use of “cartoons as historical sources”. In a 2010 book of the same title, he has argued that “in past epochs the key political cartoons of the day were imagined to be among the 'great sources' for historians.“ In contemporary academic history

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Richard-Scully>

<sup>2</sup> One very inspiring article published elsewhere should be mentioned: Ellen Sebring, *Civilization & Barbarism: Cartoon Commentary & “The White Man's Burden”* (1898–1902), [https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/civilization\\_and\\_barbarism/index.html](https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/civilization_and_barbarism/index.html).

writing, however, he argues, „these important documents are often employed only as 'illustrations', or visual aids to 'more serious' texts.“<sup>3</sup>

Comic empires, which is based on an international symposium held a few years earlier,<sup>4</sup> encompasses articles by experts in the field from Australia, England, France, China and the US and presents among others quite a few “exotic” cartoons from places like Egypt and China. To put it short, it succeeds in pointing out that „cartoons were a key means by which British readers encountered and engaged with key issues of empire and imperialism.“ (p. 3). The book convincingly shows the value of cartoons for historical research – not only but especially for the topic of imperialism. While today cartoonists are sometimes romanticized as powerful defenders of democracy, free speech and human rights, many of the articles show how cartoonists have defended the European supremacy.

Two years earlier, Scully finished his monumental project „Eminent Victorian Cartoonists“, published in three volumes by the British Political Cartoon Society. Scully’s biographical sketches of the leading British cartoonists of the 19th century are especially welcome as much of the research so far on cartoons has concentrated overwhelmingly on the 18th century while the 19th has been at least partly neglected. Once again, the author fills an often-lamented gap in the field of cartoon research.

While the first volume, „The Founders“, examines the life and work of the three cartoonists who „transformed graphic satire from the bawdiness of the Georgian and Regency period, to the respectable art-form of the Victorian era“ (John 'HB' Doyle (1797-1868), John Leech (1817-1864), and Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914)), volume II explores the life-stories of five lesser-known cartoonists, among them Matt Morgan (1837-1890), who drew for Fun, Judy, and The

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Scully, Behind the Lines: Cartoons as Historical Sources, 2010.

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280005009\\_%27Comic\\_Empires\\_Cartoons\\_Caricature\\_and\\_Imperialism\\_A\\_Symposium\\_-\\_Introduction%27](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280005009_%27Comic_Empires_Cartoons_Caricature_and_Imperialism_A_Symposium_-_Introduction%27)

Tomahawk; William Henry Boucher (1837-1906), who published in *Judy*, *Will O' The Wisp*, and *Moonshine*; and John Gordon Thomson (1841-1923), who worked for *The Graphic* and *Fun*. Volume III is a study of the „Heirs and Successors“ to the Victorian tradition, concentrating on Linley Sambourne (1844-1910), Sir Francis Carruthers Gould (1844-1925) and Sir Bernard Partridge (1861-1945). With this monumental work, Richard Scully has built and rightfully earned a reputation of being the eminent scholar – or in French, the doyen – of British 19th century cartoon research .<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Compare also Professor David Kunzle's long review article on Richard Scully's three-volume history 'Eminent Victorian Cartoonists':  
[https://www.academia.edu/38532400/Kunzle\\_on\\_Scully\\_REVIEW\\_Eminent\\_Victorian\\_Cartoonists\\_pdf](https://www.academia.edu/38532400/Kunzle_on_Scully_REVIEW_Eminent_Victorian_Cartoonists_pdf)