

BOOK REVIEWS

Columbia Journals David Thompson, edited by Barbara Belyea. Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1994. xxiv, 336 pp. \$49.95 cloth.

This is an intriguing book, partly because Thompson's daily journals of his several explorations toward and along the Columbia River and its tributaries have not previously been published (except in fragments) and are full of intriguing material, but particularly because of Barbara Belyea's approach to editing.

Belyea believes that texts should be left, as much as possible, to stand on their own. Editors should modernize texts as little as possible, neither historicizing them nor imposing their own interpretations — as did both Tyrrell and Glover in editions of Thompson's *Narratives*. The "real" Thompson will not be found. Something of him will emerge in the texts he created, but they are to be understood in relation to their purpose and medium. Therefore, Belyea presents texts that are as uninterpreted as possible. There are no footnotes, no note numbers inserted in the text. The notes, keyed to dates and located after all the journals, do not provide supporting information so much as alternative texts. Therefore, for example, the notes rarely make clear where Thompson is. Chevreuril are identified as white-tailed deer, but when Thompson reports having learned from the Kootenays that Blackfoot had plundered Fort Augustus, a note provides an alternative text by Thompson, but no information about Fort Augustus, when, or if, it was attacked, or what happened there. Essentially, Belyea places little store in information; she believes that the world is constructed and given meaning textually, and wishes to give the reader Thompson's text, not hers.

Behind this book lie theory and argument that specialists in textual criticism can engage better than I. The question for those using Thompson's accounts is whether this type of editing provides what we need. For the most part, I think it does. Thompson's texts are clear, and the overburden of an editor's interpretation does not have to be stripped away. The notes, reflecting Belyea's considerable knowledge of related texts, are suggestive but do not direct or foreclose. On the other hand, some of the usual accompaniments of edited collections of explorers' journals are not in this book. There are, for example, no maps showing Thompson's routes (although there are reproductions at various scales of some of Thompson's maps). From Belyea's perspective, presumably, to create such maps is to create another text, not Thompson's. A reader might do so, but not an editor trying to preserve Thompson's textual integrity. Fair enough, I suppose. My only observations are these. A work is inevitably surrounded by other texts, and as long as the editor's comments and interpretations can be distinguished from the original, many readers will welcome such interventions. They can be useful and they would seem to be part of the conversation with the original. For whom, after all, is a publication of Thompson's journals. In one way or another, specialists can probably get to the archives. In large part, a book like this has to be for the general public, few of whom will be in a position, for example, to decipher Thompson's routes. At some point, texts that are not somewhat retextualized may not warrant publication in expensive books if the original (or various reproductions) are available in accessible archives. In this case the importance of the material, the originality of Belyea's method, and the suggestive richness of her notes justify publication, but one could easily be less sure about other similar publications. In short, I suspect a case can still be made for more active editing.

Thompson's journals, beginning in 1800 with his first probes into the Rockies and ending in 1811 with his return from Fort Astoria, are an explorer's often-quite-elaborate field notes. Less accessible reading than his Narrative, they are full of intriguing observations about the watershed of the Columbia at the beginning of European contact. Most interesting for me are his accounts of the establishment of Kootenae House and his descriptions of and comments about the Kootenay, Flat Bow (Western Kootenay), and Flat Head (Interior Salish) peoples. Belyea provides a full bibliography of Thompson manuscripts and editions, and a useful list of secondary sources.