

# DAVID THOMPSON

## *Mapmaker and Mythmaker*

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**D**AVID THOMPSON as a writer has not yet received the attention he deserves. However, since narrative style cannot be separated from the story told, it is appropriate to begin with a summary of his life and achievements. He was born in London of Welsh parents in 1770 and came to what is now Canada in 1784, where he lived until his death in 1857. Between the ages of fourteen and eighty, he worked as trader, surveyor, explorer, mapmaker, naturalist, and writer, first for the Hudson's Bay Company, then for the North West Company, and later for various British and Canadian governmental bodies. In more than six decades he travelled over 80,000 miles by foot, canoe, and horse, taking observations and recording events and natural and social phenomena in his journals or day books. More than 50,000 of these miles were covered in his twenty-eight years in western and northern North America. The remainder were in eastern Canada and the United States during the second half of his life.

Thompson's surveys take in a wide area on both sides of the present Canadian-American boundary from Montreal to the Pacific. His main discoveries include the Reindeer Lake and Black River route to Lake Athabasca, the upper regions of the Missouri, the source of the Mississippi, the Howse and Athabasca Passes through the Rockies, the upper Columbia River and its sources and branches, Kootenay River and Lake, and much of the interior of southern British Columbia and the American Northwest. In addition he surveyed and drew most of the maps establishing the boundary between Canada and the United States from Montreal to the Lake of the Woods. He mapped the Muskoka country between the Ottawa River and Lake Huron, and laid out the Eastern Townships in southeastern Quebec. In his last years as a surveyor he made hydrographic charts of the St. Lawrence River from Cornwall to Three Rivers.

The late J. B. Tyrrell, himself an outstanding geographer, explorer, and his-

torian, intimately familiar with Thompson's work and the area he surveyed, called him "the greatest practical land geographer who ever lived." As a layman, I can only remark that I do not know of any other land explorer whose work surpasses Thompson's in years of experience, extent of territory explored and mapped, consistent accuracy up to the limits of the instruments and methods available, perception and recording of significant natural and human detail, and ability to generalize. Canada and the world have many great land explorers, but the man I think of as Thompson's peer is Captain James Cook, the sea geographer.

Without claiming expertise, I can supplement Tyrrell's estimate from maps and documents not available to him. A series of maps drawn by Thompson, but not credited to him, were the source for seventy-five years of much new information about western North America. These include those published by Alexander Mackenzie in 1801, two maps drawn for the North West Company in 1813-14, a map published by the same in 1816, a set of two maps of the West in general and the Oregon country in particular drawn in 1826, and another similar more perfect set drawn in 1843.

The value of Thompson's journals for science and history has been gradually dawning on modern scholars. John Warkentin has found in Thompson's papers what he believes to be the first general description of the geological structure of the Canadian West. Allan H. Smith, in the Northwestern United States, has used Thompson's maps and journals to help find old Indian camp sites. The Smithsonian Institution has made use of a small part of Thompson's daily weather notes. But these instances are only placer pockets on the edges of a great unworked lode.

Late in life, about 1845, Thompson finally settled down to write the book he had long intended, the story of his travels in the West. When ill health and near blindness made further writing impossible at the age of eighty, it was unfinished. Tyrrell was responsible for the editing and publishing of the manuscript by the Champlain Society in 1915, under the title, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Since Thompson always referred to his book as his *Travels*, I have chosen to follow his own usage. Incomplete, and in places still almost in note form, Thompson's *Travels* belongs among the world classics of travel writing, and is one of the finest works in Canadian literature. Undoubtedly much of its interest springs from its content of adventure and scientific achievement. However, and this is the main point of this paper, Thompson's *Travels* has unique qualities of style and imagination, ranging from precision of word choice to sensitivity to myth, which lift it to literary greatness.

The primary feature of Thompson's prose is directness; it is a practical style, concerned in the first place with the business of explaining the ways of life, natural and human, in the Canadian wilderness, for example the country around Hudson Bay: "Of all furs the furr of the hare is the warmest, we place pieces of it in our mittens, the skin is too thin for any other purpose." Behind this intense practicality lies a tremendous power for exact scientific observation, which for all its bareness still conveys a sense of variety and warmth, as in his description of the species of ptarmigan or white grouse:

The willow Grouse has a red stripe round the upper eyelid, is a finer bird than the rock grouse, and one fifth larger: they are both well feathered to the very toe nails; all their feathers are double, lie close on each other, two in one quill, or socket, and appear as one feather; the under side of the foot, have hard, rough, elastic feathers like bristles.

From the description of the animal, Thompson moves, characteristically, to its habits and then to its relations to men. In the passage which follows, note the concreteness, the sense of human activity, and Thompson's keen awareness of environment, particularly of weather:

After the bitter cold of December and January is passed, they congregate in large flocks. Each man now bags from thirty to forty grouse per day, but as this is a Load too heavy to hunt with, part is buried in the Snow and only taken up when going to the Tent. . . . we walk and pick up the bird, then get the powder in, and walk again, at length [get in] the shot, and the gun is loaded; it is needless to say, exposed to such bitter cold, with no shelter, we cannot fire many shots in a short day, gloves are found to be worse than useless.

Thompson then explains how, later in the winter, mainly in March, the ptarmigan are netted. He outlines the process so clearly that a reader should be able to build and work a net himself, ending with a stark description of how the birds are taken and killed and a sharply practical explanation:

. . . the net falls, we directly run and throw ourselves on the net, as the strong efforts of forty or fifty of these active birds might make an opening in the net. We have now to take the neck of each grouse between our teeth, and crack the neck bone, without breaking the skin, and drawing blood, which if done, the foxes destroy the parts of the net on which is blood and around it, which sometimes happens to our vexation, and we have to mend the net.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of Thompson's diction is its numerical, measured exactness. Indeed, the large proportion of mathematical material in Thompson's writing may have prevented many readers from seeing the intense

imagination at work within his almost infinite factuality. Thompson's mind must have been one of the most complex organic computers that ever existed. I am convinced that between the ages of twenty and eighty it counted and registered almost every step he took and its direction, but without ever missing the qualitative detail of what was around him. Other sources of Thompson's vocabulary are the Bible, seventeenth and eighteenth century prose, the literature of science and natural history, the language of the fur trade, and the translated concepts of the Indians.

In the passages quoted there is an almost complete lack of metaphor. But as Thompson moved towards the conclusion of the description of the white grouse, he expresses what is always just below the surface, his thoughtfulness about the beauty of the earth:

... no dove is more meek than the white grouse. I have often taken them from under the net, and provoked them all I could without injuring them, but all was submissive meekness, rough beings as we were, sometimes of an evening we could not help enquiring why such an angelic bird should be doomed to be the suffering prey of every carnivorous animal, the ways of Providence are unknown to us.

Meek as a dove, angelic — ordinary words and comparisons, in most writers trite — transformed in the context of Thompson's concreteness into new life. And expressive, moreover, of Thompson's character, the scientist wondering and finding out if ptarmigan could be provoked, yet marvelling and sympathetic at the same time. Thompson, a man whom nothing could make idle, whose curiosity was insatiable, who wintering on Reindeer Lake pounded frozen mercury to discover its physical properties, and, in the summer, observed, through a pocket microscope, the anatomy of the mosquitoes which were biting him.

**T**HOMPSON'S PROSE exemplifies something of the ideals of Wordsworth's *Preface*: the compatibility of science and poetry, the expressive power of common speech, and the power of nature as a teacher. Like the naïve Wordsworth, the semi-literate David Thompson is a misconception, although Thompson had little formal education. There is evidence in his notebooks and *Travels* of extensive reading in science, philosophy, travel, and literature, and of awareness of the scientific concepts of his time. The deep religious feeling that lies behind his description of the dove, combined with much immediate observation and his knowledge of Indian thought, allowed him to stand outside and be critical of contemporary concepts and jargon. Describing the migration of the

reindeer, Thompson records the scornful words of the Indians about the idea of instinct; then he himself goes on to say: "I have sometimes thought Instinct, to be a word invented by the learned to cover their ignorance of the ways and doings of animals for their self preservation, it is a learned word and shuts up all the reasoning powers."

Sometimes, deep Christian though he is, Thompson's empathy with the Indian mind makes him write almost as though he were thinking in Indian terms, although notes of the European scientific and religious observer slip in:

The Manito of the geese, ducks, &c. has given his orders, they collect, and form flocks of, from 40 to 60, or more; and seem to have leaders. The Manito of the equatic fowl has now given his orders for their departure to milder climates, his prescience sees the setting in of winter, and the freezing of the ponds. The leaders of flock have now a deep note. The order is given, and flock after flock, in innumerable numbers, rise.<sup>1</sup>

The above passage brings us close to one more source of stylistic strength in Thompson, his ability to catch the characteristic speech and turn of mind of others. And often the figures of speech he takes from others are anything but the commonplaces which Thompson tended to use himself.

. . . at length the rain ceased, I was standing at the door watching the breaking up of the clouds, when of a sudden the Indians gave a loud shout, and called out "Oh, there is the mark of life, we shall yet live," on looking to the eastward there was one of the widest and most splendid Rainbows I ever beheld; and joy was now in every face.

Thompson speaks of the difficulties of learning the real thoughts of the Indians, a problem fully recognized by modern anthropologists, since as Thompson says the Indians answer direct questions in the manner "best adapted to avoid other questions, and please the enquirer." What Thompson has to tell about Indian beliefs and customs is almost uniquely valuable, in part because of his decades of experience with them, again because he knew them in many cases before they had had any significant contact with white men, and also because he developed a comparative method of studying their customs, based on experience with the many tribes which he knew and never lumped together as Indians, distinguishing

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations are transcribed directly from Thompson's manuscript. Tyrrell's editing is usually quite accurate. In this passage, however, his reading was confused by the attempts of Charles Lindsey to improve the mechanics of Thompson's style. The mechanical irregularities of Thompson's writing, obvious enough in the quotations, have probably contributed to the slowness of his recognition as a writer.

them as carefully as he did the species of the natural world. In addition he had the testimony of his half-Indian wife, whom he taught to read and write English. But above all because he shared their lives and spoke their languages. Possibly some of the mechanical problems of Thompson's style are the price that we have to pay for the fact that he began to learn Indian languages at the age of fourteen, and could learn them, because his mind was not encumbered with the linguistic fallacies of classical grammar twisted to fit English.

My knowledge has been gained when living and travelling with them in times of distress and danger in their prayers to invisible powers. . . . After a weary day's march we sat by a log fire, the bright Moon, with thousands of sparkling stars, passing before us, we could not help enquiring who lived in those bright mansions; for I frequently conversed with them as one of themselves.

Thompson then goes on, in a way which touches a problematic side of his character, one which has raised questions among hostile historians such as A. S. Morton and Richard Glover. "A Missionary has never been among them, and my knowledge of their language has not enabled me to do more than teach the unity of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments." The ego of Thompson's puritanism, combined with the conceit that he could believe he had achieved so much, is here apparent. Judged as a man of lesser achievements, it is easy to see that Thompson can be regarded as a monster of self-righteousness. Almost the same judgment can easily and has been given against Milton. But how is it possible to measure such ego against Thompson's determination, from the time he was twenty, to bring the whole of unknown Northwestern America within the range of human knowledge, and in fact to succeed?

The cells of Thompson's writing are short pithy pages of description or anecdote. This characteristic makes it hard to illustrate his writing in sentences and explains my use of rather long quotations. To confirm this point of anecdotal units, to remind you that Thompson is important as a surveyor in eastern as well as western Canada, and to indicate that Thompson's gift of characterization included whites as well as Indians, I give a condensed version of an unpublished account of how fever struck down the Canadian-American boundary survey party in the swamps of Lake Erie in 1819. Thompson had proposed that he and the chief American surveyor each make a quick survey of the marshes of his own side of the lake:

I had scarcely uttered the words when General Porter sprang up, saying, "The man that will dare to do it is dead, dead." Captain Douglass very gallantly said, "It is the cause of science; I will undertake to row round the marshes on the south

side if you will do the same on the north side." General Porter said "Gentlemen you may do as you please, but I would not give a cent for your lives."

Thompson proceeds to tell how both parties caught the fever.

With a boat's crew of six hearty men I was often reduced to two rowers. The men would fall to the bottom of the boat as if thrown down.

Then Thompson's men, after taking refuge from the swamps on an island off-shore, were rescued and taken on board an American steamer.

I requested some acid liquor, but the sickness had been so great that they had expended everything. They offered me water, I refused it, and my feverish mind looked with contempt on Lake Erie as not sufficient to allay my burning thirst. The surgeons came and enquired [of my attendant] if I were not dead. He said, "No." "Well," they replied, "He must die today" This was close to my bed. The next morning they came and enquired, "Is he not dead yet?" The answer was no. They said, "Let us go and see him." They found me without any fever but reduced to a mere skeleton.

This is an example of Thompson the recorder of history at the moment of happening: exact, detailed and immediate, filled with real people, important as a source, but perhaps even more important for the near fable form in which he catches the events, a form which lifts them to legend. Let me give another instance from unpublished Thompsoniana, this time the story of the migration of French-Canadians from the Illinois River to settle west of the Rockies in the North-western United States before either Lewis and Clark or Thompson entered the area, a story which I believe no other writer has ever set down, an unknown chapter in the history of Canadians, which will eventually be fitted into the foundation literature of both the Canadian and American West:

At first they were about 350 men, but their precarious way of life, sometimes with Indians in their wars, soon reduced them, and at the cession of the country by Spain they were only full 150 men. The United States insisted on their becoming settlers on the lands or retiring elsewhere. They chose the latter, took up their rifles; and with their few women crossed the Missouri River and hunted on its west bank, continually advancing towards the mountains, where I first met them.

The same fate still attended them, as all the natives of these fine countries are too often in a state of petty warfare. Some of these men were camping with them, and as the Indians acknowledged no neutrals, they had to fight for the party with whom they were found; as the Indians dreaded them as good marksmen, they were aimed at in battle. When I first became acquainted with them in 1809, they were then reduced to twenty-five men.

Everywhere the Indians, both friends and enemies, spoke of them as a brave race of men, whose conduct was always prudent and manly. Even these few men were reduced to only two, Michel Bordeaux and Augustin Kinville, two of my companions, brave and faithful, on whose word for life or death I could depend. In the summer of 1812 they were with the Salish Indians, when a battle was fought with the Piegans, who were defeated. Yet these two brave men were killed, and thus ended the last of these men, few of whom died a natural death.

This passage provides a natural transition to one of the main statements of this article, that David Thompson's *Travels* express and are unified by a statement of the quality of human life in societies where there is no vested authority. There are other unifying threads in the *Travels*: the journeys of exploration, the recurring characters, and above all the character of the narrator himself. I have however dealt briefly with these matters elsewhere, and I think they should be immediately apparent to the thoughtful reader. To sharpen our perception of the depth of Thompson's understanding of precivilized man, I turn now to R. M. Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay*: a book which Thompson read while writing his own and on which he commented with acerbity. Here is an anecdote which Ballantyne says was told him by another trader:

Wisagun, peeping in between the chinks of the tent to see what the women were doing, saw his wife engaged in cutting up one of her own children, preparatory to cooking it. In a transport of passion, the Indian rushed forward and stabbed her, and also the other woman; and then fearing the wrath of the other Indians, he fled to the woods. . . . During the night Wisagun and Natappe returned stealthily to the tent, and, under cover of the darkness, murdered the whole party as they lay asleep. . . . the horrible deed [Wisagun] excused by saying that *most* of his relations had died before he ate them.

The Victorian view of the savage as utterly depraved is clearly behind this fur trader's horror story. The attitude involved is as misleading as that behind the eighteenth-century idea of the noble savage. Let us take a comparable account from Thompson, noting how he avoids both these European misconceptions, and tells his story without glossing over anything, yet with sympathy and inside perception of the exact relevant social relationships. His anecdote from the beginning involves real individuals in a particular group:

One morning a young man of about twenty two years of age on getting up, said he felt a strong inclination to eat his Sister; as he was a steady young man and a promising hunter, no notice was taken of this expression; the next morning he said the same and repeated the same several times in a day for a few days. His



Parents attempted to reason him out of this horrid inclination; he was silent and gave them no answer; his Sister and her Husband became alarmed, left the place, and went to another Camp, he became aware of it; and then said he must have human flesh to eat, and would have it; in other respects, his behaviour was cool, calm and quiet. His father and relations were much grieved; argument had no effect on him, and he made them no answer to their questions. The Camp became alarmed for it was doubtful who would be his victim.

Then Thompson precisely describes the manner in which this group dealt with an individual threatening their community.

His Father called the Men to a Council, where the state of the young man was discussed, and their decision was, that an evil Spirit had entered into him, and was in full possession of him to make him become a Man Eater (a Weetego) The father was found fault with for not having called to his assistance a Medicine Man, who by sweating and his Songs to the tambour and rattle might have driven away the evil spirit, before it was too late. Sentence of death was passed on him, which was to be done by his Father. The young man was called, and told to sit down in the middle, there was no fire, which he did, he was then informed of the resolution taken, to which he said "I am willing to die"; The unhappy Father arose, and placing a cord about his neck strangled him, to which he was quite passive . . .

Finally there is the explanation of why the execution was carried out in the way decided, indicating on Thompson's part, a deep understanding of primitive social relations.

It may be thought the Council acted a cruel part in ordering the father to put his Son to death, when they could have ordered it by the hands of another person. This was done, to prevent the law of retaliation; which had it been done by the hands of any other person, might have been made a pretext of revenge by those who were not the friends of the person who put him to death.

**T**HOMPSON'S PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING of such an incident reveals the essentially melodramatic and shallow view of Ballantyne, reflecting a racist corruption element in the Victorian outlook. Ballantyne believed that the British were really doing non-Europeans a favour by bringing them missionaries, policemen, trade, and European concepts of property and propriety, even though the process involved killing a substantial proportion of the beneficiaries and des-

troubling their society. His views would now matter little, had his books not played a part in producing a recent fictional variant of his outlook. The relation of Ballantyne's *Coral Island* to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, is well known, although most commentators emphasize the differences. Actually it is far more important to realize that both authors assume the same pseudomyth: that the heart of man is desperately wicked unless saved by grace and upheld by the institutions of civilization — civilization obviously meaning the church, the law, the police, and military discipline. The difference between Ballantyne and Golding is Ballantyne blaming the violence of his heroes' actions on the ingratitude of their victims, and Golding blaming the breakdown of modern civilization on that non-existent abstraction, natural man, found in the heart of every schoolboy and adult. These are two sides of the same coin. Heads, Queen Victoria; tails, Britannia's trident, now bent.

Thompson, who worked with Indians for over twenty-eight years, was almost always able to achieve his ends by diplomacy, largely because he understood the operation of the law of tribe and family blood vengeance and the very limited power of the Indian chiefs. He tells an amusing story illustrating the above point.

The Chiefs that are acknowledged as such, have no power beyond their influence, which would immediately cease by any act of authority and they are all careful not to arrogate any superiority over others.

When out on the Plains one of these Chiefs had rendered me several services, for which I had then nothing to pay him. On my return to the house, by interpreter, I sent him a fine scarlet coat trimmed with orris lace, and a message that as I understood he was going to war, I had sent him this coat as a recompense for his services with some tobacco, but the interpreter, not thinking this homely message sufficiently pompous, on delivery of the coat, told him I had sent it to him as being a great Chief and to be his dress on going to War as a Chief. He was surprised at such a message; and the next day, by a young man, sent it with the message to the Chief at the next camp, who not liking the tenor of the message, sent both to another camp, and thus it passed to the sixth hand, who being something of a humourist, sent it to a very old chief, who was not expected to live, he kept it, telling the messenger to thank the Trader for sending him such a fine coat to be buried in

Golding and Ballantyne are chiefly aware of primitive dance as expressing and arousing frenzy and leading to war and murder. Thompson sees the wide range of quality and meaning in Indian dances. He describes, for instance, a dance of Nahathaway or Cree women to the Manito of the marten for success in trapping. Their husbands and brothers

proposed they should dance to the Manito of the Martens, to this they willingly consented, it was a fine, calm, moonlight night, the young men came with the Rattle and Tambour, about nine women formed the dance, to which they sung with their fine voices, and lively they danced hand in hand in a half circle for a long hour; it is now many years ago, yet I remember this gay hour.

The summer ritual of the Mandan Indians on the upper Missouri, who practiced very rudimentary agriculture, is probably an example of agricultural fertility rites in their most primitive form. While the puritanical Thompson was shocked by the rites, he records them exactly and sees not only the ceremonies, but how individuals adjust their own ways to communal practice.

The first day both sexes go about within and without the Village, but mostly on the outside, as if in great distress, seeking for persons they cannot find, for a few hours, then sit down and cry as if for sorrow, then retire to their houses. The next day the same is repeated, with apparent greater distress accompanied with low singing. The third day begins with both sexes crying (no tears) and eagerly searching for those they wish to find, but cannot; at length tired with this folly; the sexes separate, and the Men sit down on the ground in one line, with their elbows resting on their knees, and their heads resting on their hands as in sorrow; the Women, standing, and crying heartily, with dry eyes, form a line opposite the Men; in a few minutes, several Women advance to the Men, each of them takes the Man she chooses by the hand, he rises and goes with her to where she pleases, and they lie down together and thus until none remain, which finishes this abominable ceremony. No woman can choose her own husband; but the women who love their husbands lead away aged Men.

In all the passages I have quoted, I think the value for natural and human history is apparent. Yet the process of history turning into legend is of equal interest, and for literature, of prime importance. It can be seen in some historians, for instance, Herodotus, or some of the individual contributors to *Hakluyt's Voyages* and the *Jesuit Relations*. Thompson's own powers in this direction are intensified by his prolonged inside understanding of the natives of North America, people who lacking written literature and codified laws, necessarily relied on verbal tradition. Under such conditions the telling and retelling of stories emphasizes the mythic-poetic powers of the transmitted story. Thompson retells Indian myths with an immediate intuitive grasp of the myth, but also with a conscious sense that the myths themselves are in the process of formation. The various traditions that Thompson repeats about the coming of smallpox among the Natives all seem to catch the tremendous impact of the disease on Indian ways. An old Indian recalls the coming of the disease:

This dreadful disease broke out in our camp, and spread from one tent to another as if the Bad Spirit carried it. We had no belief that one Man could give it to another, any more than a wounded Man could give his wound to another. We did not suffer so much as those that were near the river, into which they rushed and died. We had only a little brook, about one third of us died, but in some of the other camps, there were tents in which everyone died. When at length it left us, and we moved about to find our people, it was no longer with the song and the dance; but with tears, shrieks, and howlings of despair for those who would never return to us.

Commenting on the memory of the Indians about life before the smallpox, Thompson says:

A strange Idea prevails among these Natives, and also of all the Indians to the Rocky Mountains, though unknown to each other: that when they were numerous, before they were destroyed by the Small Pox all the animals of every species were also very numerous and more so in comparison of the number of natives than at present.

Here we can see how the coming of the white man stimulated an Indian myth of a golden age.

Thompson includes a number of Cree myths, including one of the flooding and recreation of the world, involving the demon Weesarkajauk, and the Otter, the Beaver, and the Muskrat, in which the Muskrat emerges as a totemic ancestor.

He now praised the Musk Rat and promised him plenty of roots to eat, with rushes and earth to make himself a house; the Otter and the Beaver he said were fools, and lost themselves, and he would find the ground, if he went straight down. Thus encouraged he dived, and came up, but brought nothing; after reposing, he went down a second time, and staid a long time, on coming up Weesarkejauk examined his fore paws and found they had the smell of earth, and showing this to the Musk Rat, promised to make him a Wife, who should give him a great many children, and become more numerous than any other animal, and telling him to have a strong heart; and go direct down, the Musk Rat went down the third time and staid so long, that Weesarkejauk feared he was drowned. At length seeing some bubbles come up, he put down his long arm and brought up the Musk Rat, almost dead, but to his great joy with a piece of earth between his fore paws and breast, this he seized, and in a short time extended it to a little island, on which they all reposed.

Thompson's telling of this and other myths is admirable, and comparison to other written versions of the same story, indicate that it is authentic. But Thompson's insight into such traditions is deeper than recording and translating. This is shown in his treatment of the tradition that once the Beaver and Man divided the world

between them, the Beaver ruling the water and Man the land. The story reflects the coming of the white man and the pursuit of the beaver in the fur trade. When Thompson tells the story as told to him by an old Indian, we are both in the presence of history and of a myth in the hours of its making.

About two winters ago, Weesaukejauk showed to our brethren, the Nepissings and Algonquins the secret of their [the beavers'] destruction; that all of them were infatuated with the love of the Castorum of their own species; and more fond of it than we are of fire water. We are now killing the Beaver without any labor, we are now rich, but shall soon be poor, for when the Beaver are destroyed we have nothing to depend on to purchase what we want for our families, strangers now overrun our country with their iron traps, and we, and they will soon be poor.

A. J. M. Smith properly says of this section that 'it has a patriarchal simplicity and dignity, an almost Homeric freshness of vision, that is unique in our literature.' One of the reasons for this special quality is the firmness with which Thompson sees the inner dynamic of the exploration of Canada by the fur traders: the rapid extermination of the beaver and the thrust onward to exploit new beaver territories which drove the fur trade ever westward. The result in about half a century was that the continent was explored from sea to sea, and the beaver was reduced to an almost lost species.

By now, largely because of the passages from Thompson which have been exhibited, it should be possible to place Thompson among his peers. Thompson's *Travels* belongs among such master works as Cook's *Voyages*, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, Bates's *Naturalist on the River Amazons*, and Stefansson's *The Friendly Arctic*. This is the company of greatness where it is ridiculous to ask who is greater or less. Thompson belongs among them as a geographer, a scientist, an observer of nature and people, and a writer. In such a group the only purpose of comparison is to clarify the distinctive quality of each author. I find Thompson's *Travels* closest in special quality to Darwin's *Beagle*. Part of the excitement of Darwin's book is to feel him almost reaching the great generalizations of the *Origin of Species*. The special excitement of Thompson is to be with him as mapmaker and historian, feeling history almost transformed into myth. Thompson is the mapmaker of the Canadian half-continent. But he is more than that; he is the foundation mythmaker of the Canadian West. He is one of the mapmakers of the Canadian mind.