

This collection ends with three shorter essays that focus on social dimensions to applied law in Alberta. Each relies heavily on legal archives, when analyzing the uses and abuses of law with regard to "Male Homosexuality . . . 1890-1920" (written by Terry Chapman), "Female Crime in Calgary, 1914-1941" (by Elizabeth Langdon), and "Urban Relief . . . 1930-1937" (by Peter Sibenik). The former luridly details anecdotal evidence for vaguely, ambiguously defined offences in law; and the latter shows how precisely defined laws could be made flexible in the face of mounting social pressures during "the Depression."

Professor Knafla and these contributors have now given us a start. It remains to western Canada's lawyers and informed laity to try the book and to judge it for the understanding it offers. Let no one be surprised that western Canada's legal history has an abundance of valuable lessons, laughs, victims, and laudable characters. The evidence from our courts, police, correction services, and legal profession awaits anyone willing to turn their hands and mind to making sense of our system.

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Vancouver: Soul of a City, edited and with an Introduction by Gary Geddes. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1986. Pp. 328.

Vancouver: Soul of a City is a beautiful book, well made, designed and printed. But it is more than beautiful; it is a richly interesting collection of literary and para-literary responses to Vancouver by some of Canada's leading writers and a number of lesser known figures whose poems, essays, or stories provide a breadth and perspective not usually found in anthologies.

But before I go on to say what *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is and what can be found within its covers, let me first suggest what this collection is *not*. It is not an awed *festschrift* on the occasion of Vancouver's centenary; it is *not* a miscellany bubbling with serendipity and mindless optimism; it is *not* a selection of all the pretty things that might be or (have been) said about "supernatural British Columbia"; it is *not* Expo '86 propaganda! If you want a coffee table hard-back singing the praises of Sacred B.C., of Indian crafts, fantastic gardens and the glories of urban development, a kind of verbal, glossy advertising gimmick, do not buy this book.

What this book does offer is far more valuable, and it is for this reason that I put it ahead of various books hastily assembled for Vancouver's

birthday. In his introduction, "City at the End of Things," Gary Geddes, who grew up in Vancouver, confesses that the volume is, in part, the answer to a lifetime's personal questioning: "I begin to wonder if Vancouver exists, if I exist. What is this strange landscape of memory, half urban pastoral, half Bosch nightmare . . . ?" By asking the question in this way Geddes supplies the general parameters, at least, of the answers contained in this volume, for Vancouver is both dream-like in its beauty and appalling in its soul-destroying ugliness, and this collection captures the city in all its phases. Moreover, Vancouver is a place, as Geddes notes, where Social Credit "anti-intellectualism and hatred of the imagination" defy the writer to attempt a "Poetics of Cities"; it is an infernal place "where chancres blossom like a rose" (Lowry) and the artist is "being absorbd by th private sector" (bill bissett). And yet, out of its many stunning contradictions — perhaps because of them — this city at the end (or is it the beginning?) of things has inspired a wealth of verbal responses, all interesting, some deeply moving, and each a unique testimony to a *topos* of the imagination that exists only in words.

There are just under ninety selections in the volume, ranging from Indian mythologies and an eye-witness account of the 13 June 1886 fire that razed the fledgling town, to short stories and poems by such writers as Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Al Purdy, Dorothy Livesay, and Frank Davey, from lyric descriptions of the ocean, Stanley Park, the magnificence of spires and streets, to savage indictments of urban brutality and the boom and bust mentality of a late twentieth-century frontier culture. Geddes has organized his selections from the work of over fifty writers in nine thematic sub-divisions such as "Real Estate in Paradise," or "Acclimatizing the Muses," but there are echoes and capillary links among sections that are, for me, more compelling than these tidy categories. Thus, Helen Potrebenco's punchy "Woman Driver" and Robin Belitsky Endres' fascinating "Integrated Circuits" reclaim the city for women from the unconscious sexism of Rudyard Kipling's "Cities, Like Women, Cannot Be Too Careful" or Eric Nicol's "Home Town" and from the pervasive maleness of the drunks and "boom men," or the down-and-outs of Norman Levine's "Vancouver."

My only criticisms of *Vancouver: Soul of a City* stem from this matter of organization. The divisions Geddes uses draw attention to themselves without always providing a relevant or meaningful context for the work included there. Why, for example, place Phyllis Webb's poem "Prison Report" in the eighth section called "Hotline"? Pat Lowther's devastating poem "Hotline to the Coast" provides the section title, but it cannot (and

should not) be stretched to provide a context or direction for the other works gathered here. There is, also, an irritating absence of dates, even in the lengthy list of acknowledgements, so that the reader has no way of knowing when George Bowering's poems were written or when Kipling described his visit to Vancouver. Since the selections interact with others in so many ways across time and textual space, the arbitrary confinement by sections, on the one hand, and the careless attitude towards dates, on the other, are puzzling and frustrating.

These problems, however, are far outweighed by the feel, texture, variety, and quality of the writing contained in the volume; every reader will have her favourites. Mine include Emily Carr's incomparable "Sophie," an exquisite first-person narrative by "Sophie's Emily," an excerpt from Irene Baird's sadly neglected 1939 novel *Waste Heritage*, Bill Bissett's "HELP ium being absordb by th private sector" — a funny, savage dramatic polylogue on the state of existence in beautiful socred british columbia — and Earle Birney's important poem "the shapers: vancouver."

Although the strength of *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is in its voices and in its stern refusal of sentimentality and centenary expedience, it is Birney's poem that best answers Geddes' introductory questions about existence:

walking alone now
 in the grandiloquent glitter
 we are lost for a way
 for a line
 bent for the mere eye's pleasure
 a form beyond need
 is there a rhythm drumming from vision?
 shall we tower into art or ashes?

it is our dreams will decide
 & we are their Shapers

(V, 288)

It is the fictions, the poetics of Vancouver, that make us real; therefore *Vancouver: Soul of a City* is less about Vancouver, finally, than it is about the human capacity to express that soul in words.