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Gerson, Carole, ed. *Vancouver Short Stories*. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 166. Map. \$9.50 (paper)

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have something different, something more exotic than the vaudeville theatre could offer. It was from this point that the escapist architecture of the movie theatre evolved and went hand in hand with the escapism in the silver screen."

There is no denying that the grand movie houses structured the viewing process and allowed patrons to abandon themselves to the fantasy on the screen. As the popularity of the movies grew, however, so too did social concern. More work should be done to determine the extent to which the concern of city fathers affected the first designs of theatres.

At the turn of the century city aldermen began to introduce stiff license fees and impose safety regulations on the buildings where movies were being shown. Church leaders printed sermons in local newspapers warning the youth away from these halls of ill-repute. In the early 1900s, in Quebec, a Board of Public Morality was established to determine the effects of the moving pictures on society.

Although Lindsay has incorporated some of the information into his history, he tends to downplay the effects of social pressure on the development of the movie theatre. Essentially, audiences were seduced by the glitz, glamour and democracy, their fascination finally over-riding any moral quandry. The movies were for the masses.

Opening programs and advertisements reprinted in *"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving"* speak to the theatre owners' attempt at securing a loyal clientele. The Allan Policy, for example, promises "lovers of artistic and refined film production . . . a painstaking and courteous service." As one browses through the old program notes it is clear that the main consideration of most theatre owners, aside from money, was that they be considered as "refined and respectable entertainment venues."

The chief consideration of the theatre owners was that of ongoing prosperity. Entertainment was a business. The more people that could be seated in the theatre during the course of a day, the more return at the box office. It is in Lindsay's discussion of the theatre circuit and the competitive nature of show business that the book shines.

Lindsay dedicates forty pages of *"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving"* to the development of Bennett's vaudeville theatre circuit at the turn of the century to the 1978 sale of Odeon Theatres of Canada Limited to an all-Canadian company, Canadian Odeon. It is interesting that since the publication of this book, Canadian Odeon was sold to another all-Canadian company, CinePlex.

Lindsay points out that our nation's theatre business is spotted with colourful characters like Alexander Pantages. Pantages was known to steal actors' trunks from the train station and take them to his theatre. On claiming his trunk "an apologetic Alexander Pantages would then convince the

actor that he would be better off to perform at Pantages' establishment, actually stealing the actor away from the rival theatre."

*"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving"* also touches base with the first Canadian film production company, started in Cobourg, Ontario. Canadian competition, however, regularly proved to be too much for the Americans; as was the case with the Canadian colour film process called "chroma-colour." "American movie companies had their own process, they were not pleased to have a rival. The message was sent out to the movie theatre exhibitors. . . . If you show chroma-colour shorts in your theatre we will not send you our full length feature films." A boycott could have effectively shut down the grand movie palaces before their time.

After reading John C. Lindsay's *"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving": A History of Canada's Theatres* one might well agree that the movie palaces turned out their stars too early. These grand theatres have been torn down or broken up to house smaller theatres. The romance remains in the pages of Lindsay's book, in the few theatres that have been reconstructed and of course, the movies.

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Gerson, Carole, ed. *Vancouver Short Stories*. Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 166. Map. \$9.50 (paper).

Carole Gerson, in her introduction, says that "the occasion of this book is the one hundredth anniversary of the incorporation of the city of Vancouver. Hence its publication is a celebration of the past. . . ." But the selected overview of stories is so bland that there are none of the fireworks associated with a celebration, and very little sense of Vancouver's past. Oh yes, there is a story of the fire that almost destroyed the city in 1886, selections to show Vancouver's ethnic diversity, fiction from some of the major writers who have lived in Vancouver for a few years, and though the collection gives a chronology of the story as it developed in Vancouver, there is little sense of the city as it was growing, little of the place that has flourished on the fringes of civilization of the Pacific rim, even little of its myth as the lotus land of Western Canada.

Earle Birney, whom Gerson refers to in her introduction as one who in his poems, "Vancouver Lights" and "November Walk at False Creek Mouth" "enhanced the literary identity of Vancouver as a complex city whose symbolic dimension is enriched by its proximity to the mountains and

to the sea" has not been surpassed by any of the fiction writers that Gerson has chosen for her collection. Despite what Gerson says, and carefully points out, these writers do not use the setting of Vancouver for symbolic or mythopoeic purposes as does, say, Morley Callaghan use the mountains and river of Montreal in his novel, *The Loved and the Lost*. Rather, if the street and park names were changed, the city referred to could be any city. There is the sense of a "ten cents' worth of view," although that view gives an impression only. Perhaps Gerson is trying to tell us that writers of short stories in Vancouver do not limit themselves to local scenes and local interests, that locale is merely local, that what makes these stories valuable fiction (if value has anything to do with it) is that they move out of the local into larger concerns, that they deal with man everywhere with concerns that are ordinary to ordinary man. If that is the case, then Gerson does not tell us so, and in her introduction, by emphasizing the "Vancouverishness" of her selection, she seems to apologize for presenting work that is not really very good.

Gerson may well have been constrained in her selection. Perhaps, because of the centennial, and the coming of Expo '86, or for other reasons, she felt she had to be fair-minded in presenting a variety of stories using Vancouver as a setting. What has appeared, rather, is a kind of medley of stories that range from melodrama, to pastiche, through slice-of-life, to stories that attempt the best of the traditional English short story in the steps of its major influences, Chekhov and de Maupassant. In the first story, "The Prophetess" by Francis Owen (the only author not given a biography — surely the dates could have been found in City records), the great fire is the backdrop, but the focus is on an Indian woman who predicts the fire because of the "vile intruders" and "the impious city"; it is melodrama, a Victorian sketch with Kipling and Poe overtones (one of the characters goes into a "death-like swoon" as the fire consumes the Indian woman), for the taste of the readers who first read it, in a 1907 issue of *Western Hol*. But is it Vancouver? M. A. Grainger's "In Vancouver" (Gerson does not tell us whether Grainger titled this section, or did she) is definitely not a short story, but the first chapter of one of his novels, "deservedly consigned to obscurity"; it is pure slice-of-life, hinting at the problems of a frontier city when the men came out of the woods only to go back after they had quickly spent their money on women, alcohol — and baths — not necessarily in that order. The stories by Pauline Johnson are Indian myths, told to her by Chief Joe Capilano, part of her *Legends of Vancouver*, and they are not short stories; they belong to an oral tradition that is indigenous with Indian folklore, not to Pauline Johnson's fiction-creating powers (though they contain her sense of language). Bertrand Sinclair's "A Golden Fleece" is stale in telling, and is not even a literary curiosity. "Phyllus" by Jean Burton, is one of the best stories in the book, a powerful cameo, but again it could have happened anywhere and elsewhere. I was pleased to see a story by Dorothy Livesay in this book (though I think she had a

son and daughter (and a husband, incidentally, the much-loved Duncan McNair), not two sons as Gerson states in the biography), though the series of stories in her *A Winnipeg Childhood*, gives a much stronger sense of that city than the one in *Vancouver Short Stories* does of Vancouver. Both the stories by Ethel Wilson and Alice Munro have the domestic nuances that they are famous for, plus penetrating and subtle character synthesis, but little sense of the place; again, the focus is on revealing developing personality, a lesson they learned from the examples of Mansfield, Woolf and Welty. "Aquarius" by Audrey Thomas is one of her better stories (and she is writing, and has been writing, some of the best stories in the country) and though it evokes the Vancouver Aquarium and the famous (now dead) whale, Skana, the story's examination of the deadening relationship between husband and wife is the focus for its effectiveness as fiction. George Bowering, as always, is facile, writing well and pun-gently, summoning the hippie world of the 1960s in Vancouver (and elsewhere). The stories by Wayson Choy (a fine perception of connection between generations), Gabriel Szohner (evoking the rain, but not the rain-forest), Joy Kogawa (another section from a novel that is on its own brittle, but in the book poignant in context), and Sky Lee, appear to be token selections to present the Vancouver ethnic mix. "A Nice Cold Beer" by Kevin Roberts, simplistically experimental in style, is not his best, and Cynthia Flood has better stories in her desk, I hope, than "The Animals in their Elements"; I know better ones have been published.

Perhaps it is a quibble, but I do not feel that this what-appears-to-be a random collection is representative either of Vancouver or the short story as practiced by those who have either lived in Vancouver or use that city as a setting for their fictions. (If a reader wants a feeling of that city, read *Vancouver Fiction*, edited by David Watmough.) Carole Gerson has proved elsewhere that she can discriminate, but she hasn't done it here. The book does not "represent" the best of Vancouver short stories, even as historical curiosities. Gerson quotes from Robert Kroetsch in her introduction that "the fiction makes us real." The key word is "us"; and the chosen authors give us a feeling of being part of the characters they create, of what they feel and do, but not of where they live. To do what Gerson says she wanted to do, the collection would have been more successful if she had given a sense of the city-at-the-other-end of Canada by including, say, Ethel Wilson's story about Joe Fortes ("Down at English Bay"), Silver Donald Cameron's story about a Chinese green-grocer and the ambience of the West Tenth/University area, a story by D. M. Fraser, Keith Fraser, Eric Nichol (a writer who has the pulse of the city in all his work; and why not a humour story? — people do laugh in Vancouver!), by David Watmough (who often puts his reader into the Jericho beach area) or, since there are more women writers in the book than men, one of the exquisite stories by Jane Rule, or since Gerson likes excerpts, something from Betty Lambert, and others.

We all make our own choices, and no one is completely happy with those of others. But this collection could be so much better and I wanted it to be. It had so much going for it; the grants for its completion were decided by people who obviously felt the need for a book to help celebrate Vancouver's centennial, to remind others that Vancouver has its own individuality as a city. The senior editor of UBC Press, Jane Fredeman, is the best there is but rarely do I see her fine hand here. And I would like to have seen some additional bibliographical information where readers could go not only for more fiction but also for some biographical/critical information, for example a reference to Betty Keller's invaluable book on Pauline Johnson, *Pauline*.

For me the most impressive things about Vancouver are the mountains and the sea, and the sense that people can get lost in a wilderness only minutes away from, and within sight of, the city. A great city Vancouver is, a beautiful city, and its urban sprawl is on the edge of the darkness initiated and contained by the ocean and the mountains. Both are mysterious and selfish, wanting no one to venture too close. Living in Vancouver produces an awareness of edges, edges where people walk precariously, enjoying that precipitousness. That is the city, and I am afraid that *Vancouver Short Stories* gives none of that away. The book is edited without flavour. I won't say anything about the cover.

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Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve with Robert Gruetter. *Vancouver's First Century A City Album, 1860-1985*. Introduction by David Brock. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$24.95.

Donegan, Rosemary. *Spadina Avenue*. Introduction by Rick Salutin. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$29.95.

To the browsing reader these two books published by Douglas & McIntyre, seem a lot alike: both use historical photographs to rummage around the nostalgia attic. But only one, *Vancouver's First Century*, sinks into the soft quilt of historical dilettantism. The other, *Spadina Avenue*, shows real signs of cracking the entertainment barrier which restricts most popular historical photo books to the mere exploitation of amusing detail.

It is becoming a common occurrence to see books similar to these crowding the gift book shelves of stores. Most have been patched together by researchers who have visited the impressive and growing collections of Canadian archival

photography and have made personal selections of dramatic and disparate "squealers": photos which provoke delighted squeals at the outmoded bathing suits, the quirky automobiles or the endearing three-legged race that nobody finds fun anymore. *Vancouver's First Century* is in this mode. The introduction by David Brock, rendering his gift-wrapped memories as a lifetime Vancouver lover, just misses the cloying. The spiritual antecedents of this volume, which roams through Vancouver chronologically from 1860 to 1985 without returning to the same spot often enough to assess any changes critically, are the "booster books" which cities published early this century to display their attractions and to encourage commercial and population growth. The brief quotations reproduced from contemporary written sources, such as newspapers, which do refer to unpleasantnesses like the history of racism and Depression poverty in the city, as well as the photographs which illustrate these events, provide only rhythm and the interest of variety. They do not alter the underlying mood of proud nostalgia. The book knows its audience — the lucky people of Vancouver's locality — and it indulges them.

In doing so, the historical integrity of the photographs, ostensibly the rationale and backbone for the book, is compromised. Each photograph is considered of value only for its minutiae; while the context for its creation, its all-important provenance, the selection of framing and timing which first determined the minutiae, is ignored. No indication is given of why these photos, spanning so much time and so many places, were ever taken; nor for whom; nor to whom they were originally addressed; nor how they were used and valued nor why they have survived. What were the intentions of the photographers and clients who opened these windows on their present? If this was their present, what impertinence to think that we, outside their time and culture, can ignore the origins of their photographs by pursuing vicarious and usually picturesque imaginings of the way things seemed to have been.

The book designer apparently felt he knew better than the original creators and participants what the photos should have looked like: many are blown-up, cropped and bled to the edges of the pages. The advertisements, reproduced to give a more period air to the whole, are equally unfortunate in lacking captions and dates. Consequently, better reproduction which does not slur their words, sometimes to illegibility, would have been of material aid. In addition, the quality of the reproductions of the historical photographs — in prestigious duotone — is lacking in highlight detail while at the same time choking the darkest areas. Possibly, in reprinting this book from its first 1977 edition, new plates were made which were underexposed and the balance between the two plates for the duotones was altered. In trying to regain the intensity of the fine original printing, the reproductions were over-linked. The resulting reproduction quality, although harsher, will probably not be criticized by the general readership for which this book is intended.