

## **Vancouver City Map**

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The city is articulated  
with hand drawn heart  
and bent shoe



George and Simon had a grand ol' time  
whistling on ships and powdering wigs  
a little blind to some people who were already there  
"the town lacked refinement, but it was certainly lively"

In 1886 it was named.  
Three months later,  
it burned down.

Thus began a history  
of ugly incidents.

The city wants me.

I weave up escalators through  
the closed eyelids of the morning.  
All of it drains from us, the exhaust, the spitting,  
the voices, the hands thrusting newspapers,  
the chores of the day, the tapping, the emails,  
trying to remember where all the time went.



On the skytrain  
heavy heads nod like  
punch-drunk boxers

Brightness, brightness,  
over the lip of the mountain.  
Pink hands, pink cheeks,  
pink sky.

When you are in such an ambidextrous city  
you are likely to lose your way.

One must be careful not to enter territory that one is unaccustomed to,  
lest you haphazardly intrude on an imagination that wants to remain private.

(1792)

George was surprised to meet  
a Spanish explorer while  
discovering the new land

and 'mortified' to learn that  
another Spaniard had  
landed a year before him

(but somehow wasn't too  
bothered by the people  
who were already here)

he straightened his wig.  
Galiano, ol' buddy,  
there's nothing a little  
rum won't fix, hmmm?

(1886)

Ah, city of exponential growth!  
Ah, what worlds oceans bring!  
The port is sorted, the ships sing.

In the grocer's display window  
the asses of upturned deer become  
improvised vases when stuffed  
with bouquets of azaleas;  
green bananas hang from the ceiling –  
so much Klondike dust on our fingers.  
Step up, step in here with dogs, mules, pickaxes  
harnesses, leather gloves and teaspoons,  
grimy boots, dirty fists and the smell  
of felled 1,000 year old cedars.

Let's play the game of speculation, folks!  
land passes from pocket to pocket –  
just hold on till the prices rise!  
Now ain't this a pretty plot full  
of trees, and hey, they're buildin'  
that new hotel cross the way  
so empty and majestic, this land  
yours for the talkin' and takin'.

Towering certainties  
of mirrored high-rises.  
Mountains nudging the city  
into the sea.

Glass and metal:  
the dark sky of rain.

Impartial, never the streets  
umbrellas point up

What little tigers  
stalk the faces of –

Sockeye return

by miracle  
or mystery

Scientists announce their astonishment  
and fishermen proclaim the getting  
hasn't been this good in 50 years.

Nets unravel into the ocean.  
Flashes of scarlet nose the fighting river  
as factories reopen for perfect killing.

Long ago, they say fish were so plentiful  
you could reach into the sea and  
catch one with your bare hands.

Those were the stories.

Anyway.

(1914)

Ahoy, ahoy, no welcome mat for you  
that's what happens when you don't read  
the fine print, why don't you people ever learn?  
Boys, my brightly turbaned boys, when we say  
DIRECT we mean DIRECT we don't care if  
you stopped in—where?—Hong Kong  
for 2 seconds, see it says "DIRECTLY from  
the place of origin" Why, everyone round here  
comes from someplace except for them over there  
Now, those ladies and gents, they came DIRECT  
from ol' England, you see? Now we've got that  
outta the way, how's about a game of cards, boys?



Broken umbrellas, shards of glass, plumes of  
bright plastic, soiled candy wrappers line the  
concrete like hieroglyphics on the street.  
The stench of rot, vomit, and piss –  
the alley is woozy with it.



(1889)

The bear thrust  
its fat mitt  
into the giant  
tree hollow  
its silver chain  
umbilical.

The park ranger  
with the moustache  
and the shackle  
to the grand red  
cedar stump.

His interest was  
purely zoological

Mr. Black Bear,  
he giggled,  
meet Mr. Blackberry.

↪

As we move away from Stanley Park  
forests muddle, green patches  
slash alongside grey buildings –

Coffee is always hot  
Words strange in your mouth –

point to the 'place of articulation'

on every corner a coffee shop

Word is the code for the thing  
we have a code for the  
code:

you hesitate to name the heart.

(1887)

Under the great Canadian steel back bone,  
under the weep blasted rock and gold dust,  
under the bloodied candied rust of dirt,  
more bones  
    more bones  
    piled like  
        dominoes.

↪

Oh, Engine No. 374,  
    how Continental, how National!

(1922)

Seraphim Joe, Seraphim Joe,  
Bajan feet and sugarcane blood  
do you blink, see Mount Hillaby  
rise like a gray whale, all scarred and slick  
a conjuring trick, your swimming kick

bending the long genuine length of ocean  
silver and blue fish reddening your ears  
every arm stroke a life saved, a life lived  
as porter, handyman, bartender, a West End  
man born from a shipwreck and beach brown neck

Seraphim Joe, Seraphim Joe,  
no family, only wet white-gloved smiles  
yet yellow eyes peck at your squat gold watch  
the Carib Grackle folds its black wings  
in your ear that tickita-tickita-tickita-ting.

This game is a game of exhaustion

a dizzying game, with no end in sight.

The game requires every player's full participation.

The rules must be agreed upon by the players.

(1885)

Mountains burden our eyes.  
Rocks are too heavy for our arms,  
we are the people of paper.

We shrugged off our sun drenched  
skins imbedded with market smells  
emerging white, glittering and icy.

We are so pure.

We are spectres on the chess board.

There is no square for us.



People walk with memories  
of all the homes they lived in.

Some still dream of footfalls on their streets,  
a land that only exists in memory  
(did it ever exist at all?)

Some words still foreign to the mouth  
even after so many years.

When looking at a map  
position is important.

Align yourself to a particular landmark,  
become extension to the city in which you are lost.

Prepositions are less important,  
whether you are on or in some place.

Near a historical building you might find  
an immovable map, itself a statue

and strangely, as in a Borges story  
you meet yourself through plexiglass:

discover the ideolocator—an arrow, a dot—  
saying “You are here.”

The city is new and ever in its newness.

High-rises creep closer to shore.

Glass is our emblem.

It reveals and always reflects.

We break up an immense  
city into villages.

We want smallness.



Somehow, the city has raised us  
to identify a babel of languages.

I was born in a tropical country  
but flew across the ocean  
to settle near a powerful river.

I live in a house carved in  
the slope of a mountain.

Voices cross and sing.  
Thoughts tick and tock.

The rain falls.  
The fog lifts.

Downtown, footsteps follow each other.  
Trolley buses throw minute sparks  
into a buffet of clouds.

Strangers sit together, huddled  
In communion of steam and chopsticks  
over fragrant bowls of ramen  
broth golden and dotted with fat