

Title: *city treaty: a long poem* by Marvin Francis, Turnstone Press, 2002

The use of small letters shows how insignificant the aboriginals were treated and the especially during the signing of the treaties. The title satirizes and plays on the unjust treaties that were negotiated by the Anglo government and First Nations. Marvin Francis' use of the word "city" in the title is emblematic of the movement of Aboriginals from the reserves to urban centers. The irony behind the use of the word "treaty" is not lost on the reader when he subtitles the book: "a long poem" because the story of oppression and humiliation is epic. When really examined through a current poetic lens like Francis's we see the horrors of ill treatment and neglect foisted upon the First Nations People. This book is dedicated to the people of Heart Lake where Francis was born. Like many other Aboriginal people, Francis took part in the massive migrations of Aboriginals to various cities across Canada.

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Genre & Tone:

The book is spoken poetry and uses blank verse and rhyme. Francis's poems protest against cultural genocide; and, as such, contain a rap quality or can be viewed as protest literature, similar to Small Boy and War Party's *Feeling Reserved* or R.T. Smith's *Red Anger*. There is a strong sing song cadence and rhythms once the poems are read out loud. The poems borrow from and play on the genre of farce, satire, and epic. The work satirizes Epic poetry written in the style of Greeks and Romans, but he also reveals the satire that under girds his speaker's awareness of a history of Aboriginal oppression, since it was epic in proportion and has left a "trail of tears" in its wake, not only in Canada, but also in the USA, and other commonwealth countries. He speaks thematically to a history of oppression and injustice. The speaker's voice is cynical, colloquial, slang, farcical, humorous, condescending, patronizing, subversive and sometimes angry. The speaker, for example the clown is an allusion borrowed from other literary traditions (Shakespeare).

*my chicken lies over the ocean*

Tone: dramatic, ironic tone, mocking, melancholic, down and out, pitiful, repugnant, grotesque, exposure, alter-ego.

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Atmosphere, Setting, Place and Time periods:

The atmosphere is painted by the cityscape: Decrepit low income housing, main street, pawn shops, bars, crack houses, police, panhandlers, drunks, graffiti, fast-food outlets, convenience stores, taxis, "the hood", cash your check joints, and street people. This world is poor, unemployed, hungry, sad and depressed. The setting is current day. Arson replaces the smoke signals from a campfire. The heart of the city: malls that are loaded with things that Aboriginals cannot buy. His poem McPemmican clarifies his opinion of fast-food throwaway culture.

*my chicken lies over the ocean*: unemployment, skid row, failed marriage, usurpation.

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Narration (Points-of-view), Character & Themes:

The themes are massive migration to the city, avoiding residential schools, urban rez, culture shock, racism, unemployment, the welfare dance, acceptance, diversity, visibility, shame, humiliation, anger, frustration, integration (hierarchical, consumer driven society, low income, slave jobs). The point of view is natives coming from the rez and new possibilities to the social monsters of crack and alcoholism. Also, there is the theme of Scratching for space and trading cash for culture. The “Plastic Shaman”—fringes of Aboriginal culture.

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Imagery: Descriptive & Sensory (sound, touch, taste, feel, and smell images):

*my chicken lies over the ocean*: “hair farts oil”, (visual, small, sensory, descriptive) ocean (visual), chicken (visual), skid row (visual, feel, descriptive), sleep (feel, sensory), clown (descriptive and sensory, visual, scary, evil, friendly, a character with a thousand faces).

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Language (emotional, detached, matter-of-fact, ornate, formal, informal, word choice):

The playing with and on the use of Standard English

*my chicken lies over the ocean*

Informal, abstract: “freaking stupido”, “my hair farts oil”, “uh huh”, “skid row”

Free verse, free flow, random thoughts but highly constructed, detached: “my wife left me for just about anybody.”

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Figurative language: (simile, puns, metaphors, personification, alliteration, irony, foreshadowing):

*my chicken lies over the ocean*:

chicken (metaphor, poverty, ill health, vice)

clown (metaphor for an alter ego)

“They took the chicken man” (metaphor, loss of dignity)

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Cultural assumptions (arguments, evaluations & analysis):

Cultural genocide

Cultural assimilation

*my chicken lies over the ocean*: cultural identity and dignity and language.

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Your Personal Views:

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