

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, May 11th, 2011

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **A K Mimi Allin**

Today's poet is **Stephen Roxborough**

Stephen Roxborough is a past board member for the Washington Poets Association, co-founder of Burning Word poetry festival, and Head Poet for Madrona Center on Guemes Island. Rox co-edited *radiant danse uv being, a poetic portrait of bill bissett* (2006) and was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize (2003, 2006). The author of six books and one CD, his newest collection, *this wonderful perpetual beautiful*, was published last month.

dear chief seattle

by Stephen Roxborough

thank you for selling us the land
of your ancestors
two million acres for 150 thousand dollars
it must have seemed like a lot of money
at the time
and it probably was
but once you sell out to the white man
you can be sure he'll try to sell you
something more
because that's the way money works
it eats a hole in your pocket
until it's all gone
and it eats a hole in your soul
until you've little left
but your dignity
and then temptation will try to pry
even that from you
but that's the way of the world
more is less
and yet we keep wanting more

so we are left with less

it was probably the right thing to do chief
sell your land
even though you didn't believe it
was really your land to sell
to the white man
they would have taken it
from you eventually
anyway
at least you made a deal instead of
a war you couldn't win
a senseless war that would've
wiped out your people
and your culture
in a few weeks instead
of fifty years
and besides now
there's a beautiful city
on the shores of your ancestors
named after you
i wonder would you recognize your name
on all the signs
did we get the spelling right?
did you even know how to read
your name in english?
i wonder what kind of paper deal
a man can make
who doesn't know
how to read and write
the language of the dealmakers?

but now there is a beautiful shining city
on the shores of your ancestors
with many tall buildings
like giant termite mounds
they have eaten most of the trees
and replaced them
with thousands of buildings
and hard black and white trails
never ending trails
trails that lead to more trails
and you'd go crazy if you tried
to follow them all
so that's why the white man
who once brought the horse to your land

invented the automobile
so they could chase their tails faster
and faster and further
until there are so many of them
tail-gating
on the main trail at once
they can't move
and that
they call rush hour

yes i think it was a good thing you sold
the land of your ancestors
because now there are hundreds
of thousands of people of all races
from all over the world
living in a beautiful shining city
with your name on it
and most of them are happy to live here
and work here and breathe
the same air
of your ancestors
so happy with the stressful events
of everyday modern life
so happy riding the great merry-go-round
of getting and spending of having and
losing or never having
and always wanting
so happy to know the great wheels
of time and commerce
will grind us all
to dust

so many happy well-fed people living
in the beautiful shining city
with your name
so happy they get addicted to corporate logos
and corporate donations
so many so happy
they build endless black and white trails
inside themselves and ride
on and on
on strong drink and big smoke
on unnatural powders
and colorful pills
riding round and around the sun
chasing their tails

and the tails of their ancestors
chasing a dream
looking for a drop of sanity
in the ocean of lunacy
a dot on the map
a home on google earth
a bank account with your 150 thousand dollars
with compounded interest in it
enough to throw a victory party
for all your ancestors
all the ones who are left
all the ones who made it big
chasing the great eagle of the great
american dream
and remember to never sell
the past or the future
never never ever sell out
so much
for so little again

-- end --