

Cockburn Bruce

"Gavin's Woodpile 803"

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working out on Gavin's woodpile
safe within the harmony of kin
visions begin to crowd my eyes
like a meteor shower in the autumn skies
and the soil beneath me seems to moan
with a sound like the wind through a hollow bone
and my mind fills with figures like Lappish runes of
power...
and log slams on rough-hewn log
and a voice from somewhere scolds a barking dog.

i remember a bleak-eyed prisoner
in the Stoney Mountain life-suspension home
you drink and fight and damage someone
and they throw you away for some years of boredom
one year done and five more to go --
no job waiting so no parole
and over and over they tell you that you're nothing...
and i toss another log on Gavin's woodpile
and wonder at the lamp-warm window's welcome
smile.

i remember crackling embers
coloured windows shining through the rain
like the coloured slicks on the English River
death in the marrow and death in the liver
and some government gambler with his mouth full of
steak
saying "if you can't eat the fish, fish in some other lake.
To watch a people die -- it is no new thing."
and the stack of wood grows higher and higher
and a helpless rage seems to set my brain on fire.

and everywhere the free space fills
like a punctured diving suit and i'm
paralyzed in the face of it all
cursed with the curse of these modern times

distant mountains, blue and liquid,
luminous like a thickening of sky
flash in my mind like a stairway to life --

a train whistle cuts through the scene like a knife
three hawks wheel in a dazzling sky --
a slow motion jet makes them look like a lie
and i'm left to conclude there's no human answer
near...
but there's a narrow path to a life to come
that explodes into sight with the power of the sun.

a mist rises as the sun goes down
and the light that's left forms a kind of crown
the earth is bread, the sun is wine
it's a sign of a hope that's ours for all time.

(Burritt's Rapids 17/11/75)

(* "Lappish runes" -- Lapp Shamans covered their
drums with striking magical symbols, which were then
used to divine, contact spirits, etc.)

(* "English River" -- river system in north-western
Ontario, polluted with mercury for the next hundred
years by the Reid paper company. Nobody is doing
much about the fact that the native people who live
along its course have lost both food and liveliho

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