

## Cockburn Bruce

### "Gavin's Woodpile"

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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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