

At the Station on the Steppes

by Gary Hardaway

The condemned sit bent and blanketed
around the dozen smallish fires
Regime police have lit
for prisoners' protection in the cold.

Tele-deportation to the penal asteroid
could occur at any time. There is
no physical reason for the wait.
It's more for drama and effect.

The condemned, arrested
and convicted as a consequence
of cheerlessness, must be prepared
for chilly rigors of the Belt.

There are other asteroids of course-
for violent crimes and crimes
of wrongful thoughts, for crimes
so utterly subversive none may have a name.

The sullen and solitary prisoners
make no small talk and keep
their distances apart.
Not one had reason to complain

and yet they did. Employed
and tended to in any illness,
allowed professions near their hearts
with little benefit to others,

such as writing, painting and the stage,
they turned to melancholy themes
and sinister representations in denial
of Regime First Principles

Happiness, Contentment, Cheerfulness
and Joy. What are The Machines good for
but the happiness of humankind?
They free us all from want.

They bring us order, plenty, and delight. None
have reason to despair and cry. Perhaps within
the endless orbits of the rocks, the sad sorrowful
can recall the goodness only life on earth can give.

