

# 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.

