

The Savages

Howard Firkin

1 Discovery

extinction of a species or a race
it looks like this ten chapters ten short steps
ten lines ten fingers round a baby's neck
your deaths the only way that we save face
not one in ten it's ten times decimate
it starts like this it starts like love like life
discovery uncovering a new
a never known a something almost true
which calls to all which calls like skin to knife
which screams to be unsealed and known as fate

2 Curiosity

the curiosity of men is bound
less often in their books than in their deeds
excusing personal desire as needs
to be fulfilled where filling can be found
and it is found where like meets like and like
seems so unlike the any others seen
those now so commonplace surpriseless drab
those here you win no fame those here you grab
no fortune here we all know what you mean
those here there's no accord for you to strike

3 Delight

when even the familiar brings surprise
delight when finding words to say hello
brings smiles delight when what i have i show
delight when we communicate with eyes
delight and certainty of our accord
their clumsy phonemes butchering what's named
they wrench their tongues like birds' necks spit and bark
night creatures calling others through the dark
we smile to hear the sound of nature tamed
delight as nature's balance is restored

4 Insatiety

there's never any shortage take your pick
they like it and they like the things it brings
you don't ask why a frigging blackbird sings
their women just expect it hard and quick
their men will hand them over for a drink
they like it take my word for it i know
i had a squaw and two chicks for a week
they fucked me arid i could barely speak
and at week's end they begged me not to go
they're animals you can't tell what they think

5 Contempt

they're more like animals the way they live
the way they can't accept the things we teach
for them some things are always out of reach
they don't respect us or the things we give
they only learn what's needed for the day
they smell unwashed their women throw the leg
for anyone the men won't work to earn
their bread the pickaninnies only learn
to steal the things they want and cannot beg
they need to help themselves that's what i say

6 Confusion

*You came to us. This land was always ours.
We learnt to speak to you because you weren't
as capable of language, never learnt
beyond the wrong names for the birds and flowers;
and now you think to tell us what you know?
But we say no. You think you'll tell us law?
We know the law. We know. We've watched you break it.
You think with new law words you can remake it?
You yesterdayers. This came long before;
was here before, will be here when you go.*

7 Retribution

whatever else there has to be respect
respect for life for property for law
equality before the law is sure
but only certain when we all expect
the law will be applied to any race
and in this case the law must now be seen
to be applied applied in full of course
with reason but if necessary force
it must be known that what we say we mean
our duty is to see the law take place

8 Slaughter

*See men. See men come. See men come and kill
and come and kill and kill and come. They come.
The slap of flesh on flesh: my skin, your drum.
My body only answers to your will,
red music of our slaughter fills our lungs
and down we drown, you pound us into silt,
you weave us into ground, you stamp and dance,
you fuck our babies in the wounds you lance,
and wear their blood and entrails like a kilt.
You savages. Our blood is on your tongues.*

9 Addiction

*Addiction comes in printed cloth, in salt,
in sugar, alcohol, in sex, in cash,
in kava, crystal meth, in ganga, hash,
in cycles of perpetual assault;
take something and you take addiction on.
To numb the pain, take poison, take your chance,
take five, take just a minute to resolve
with chemistry what nothing else can solve,
to take it lying down can be a stance—
take it from me... you can't because it's gone.*

10 An end

this folk tale has no happy ever after
this ends in smoke this ends in something charred
this ends in winding dirt tracks being tarred
a stinking mucus choking songs and laughter
recovery will look a lot like rage
beneath the ground you cannot see the seed
its miracle is not to grow but wait
for fire or rain it needs to germinate
and then fulfil its fundamental need
to tell its story to the waiting age