

# The Ships of the Neva

*by* Neil McCarthy

1.

It is like the first day after the last day of war  
and I am the lost soldier, long presumed dead.

I am Pushkin returning from exile,  
enough breath pent-up within  
to blow the ships of the Neva seaward.

There are mirrors in the ice pools on the roads  
and I am a ghost yet to be reflected.

There are eyes squinting and frowns below them,  
a score of chary siskins amongst the poplars;  
each a charade of me

in my capricious form of fancy.

There are four archangels perched upon a telephone  
wire, three ready for take off; the other,  
to mewl upon a blazing cloud,  
perchance set alight this oblast.

This oblast is rich with blood. This oblast harbours  
more than the ships of the Neva in its white sheets.

And I am crossing Anichkov where there are already  
nine and twenty months of fire folded into the sky.

I feel nine ounces of bread in my hand and bruises  
in my pocket ready for occasion.

I wish there were shoes in the shoe boxes that  
I am returning to maraud,  
but there are not.

2.

Where in the shadows of these raw streets  
does love last longer than a flyer?

I see good-will gestures of ill-tempered men recanted,  
fickle as a photograph of wind.

I see the smile return to the seraphim's face,  
fugitive as a wave's raucous beauty.

I see oligarchs and otters fighting for power,  
peasants and perch watching on, toothless.  
I see the waving arms of history reduced  
to a nod  
and wonder from whom are these tacit waters running  
if not God?

