Translated by Nadine Jarintzov

THE BEGINNING OF THE POEM

“THE BRONZE HORSEMAN”

(lines 1–90)

He stood upon the lonely shore,

In thought deep as the waves’ deep roar,

And gazed into the distance. Grandly

The Neva rolled her width before;

A solitary boat skimmed swiftly.

Just here and there against the green

And swampy moss there could be seen

Black dots of Finnish dingy hovels.

The sunshine hid by misty screen

In the dark forest held no revels;

The trees moaned, murmuring.

He thought:

“Hence Sweden’s might shall we o’ershadow,

Here build a town—thorn in the side

To vex our haughty neighbour’s pride.

Nature herself wills that our window

Should here be cut through Europe’s wall;

Firm on the Baltic shores, we shall

See foreign ships each other follow

With fluttering flags to the new port,

And, joyful, feast our guests at Court.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

A hundred years—a city new,

The northern lands’ fair pride and wonder,

Rose from the swamps where forests grew;

A stately, gorgeous beauty! Yonder,

Where hitherto a lonely Finn,

Nature’s sad stepson, cast his fish-net

Into the virgin waves, whose din

Alone broke silence round his hamlet

Upon the bleak, low shore—there throng

Gay crowds the busy streets along;

And shouldering each other, masses[[2]](#endnote-2)

Of towers and palaces now stand;

Long file of ships passes, re-passes

Through harbours, by the wealth-strewn strand.

Herself in granite Neva clad,

Hung themselves bridges o’er the waters,

Decked themselves out her island daughters

With many a garden green and glad.

Bows now her head old Moscow, drooping

Before the younger capital,

As to a new Tsaritsa stooping

A dowager Queen in purple pall.

I love thee, Peter’s own creation;

I love thy stiff and stately sight,

Broad Neva’s powerful fluxation,

Her great embankments’ granite might,

Inwrought designs of iron gateways,

Thy still, transparent, thoughtful nights

When soft and silvery moonless glimmer

Enters my room—and, without lights,

I read and write past midnight chiming,

While, clear cut, sleep the giant buildings

Along the empty streets, and higher

Soars bright, the Admiralty spire.

And, the deep dark of night not letting

Touch the gold skies, the dawn of day

To take the twilight’s place is fretting,

Just yielding night one half-hour’s sway.

I love thy cruel winter bright,

On Neva’s ice the sleigh’s fleet races,

The glow of frost on maidens’ faces,

Motionless space of ice-nipped height;

The ball-rooms’ talk, their buzz and dazzle,

And, at the hour when young men razzle,[[3]](#endnote-3)

The foamy punch-bowl hissing blue.

I love the warlike clash and clamour

Of spring manœuvres in Mars Square,

The footmen and the horsemen there

In rhythmical and even glamour;

Over each stately rippling line

The captured colours torn and tattered,

And of those helmets bright, shot-shattered

In former frays, the brazen shine.

I love the cannons’ smoke and thunder

The martial capital will see

When in the northern Palace yonder

Tsaritsa bears the heir-to-be;

Or when a war in triumph past

Rus’ celebrates with joyous voices,

Or when broad Neva breaks at last

Her ice and whirls it seaward fast,

And, scenting the spring days, rejoices.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Nadine Jarintzov, *Russian poets and poems, “classics” and “moderns”, with an introduction on Russian versification*, with a preface by Jane Harrison. Oxford: B.H. Blackwell 1917. On the web at

<https://archive.org/details/russianpoetsand00jarigoog>

1. Two untranslatable touches in this line: the vigorous “syllable of nuance” attached to the verb to feast, *за*пиру́емъ, which adds much movement to it; and на простóрѣ ! See The Russians and their Language, pp. 25–27. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Pùshkin uses here the word грома́ды, meaning, literally, “enormities” which we often apply to huge buildings. Towards the end of [the section translated] he says, in a similar way, “the smoke and thunder of thy “solidity” or “fundamentality”—which is impossible in English, but a fine, strong word in Russian: твоей тверды́ни дымъ и громъ. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. I don’t think that many lines, in translating poetry, had so much useless attempting, hard trying, researching, debating and wondering concentrated on them as this line had! But all remained in vain, for the mere reason that there is no term in English which would mean—without being vulgar or slang—холоста́я пиру́шка ! in Russian this adjective and noun mean a harmless, but a boisterous, happy, gathering of young bachelors round a punch-bowl (or any inspiring liquors!). To me, the suggested (and insisted upon) “razzle” sounds odd and vulgar, while Pùshkin is only realistic, true to the subject. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Here he uses a lovely, sparkling Russian variety for the word rejoices: лику́ет, instead of the ordinary ра́дуется. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)