

Aboard the Alexandr Pushkin, M.V.

The intercom rouses us
with an old Beatles tune
and a voice grown sleepier and sleepier
as mornings come earlier and earlier
in four languages.

Nine hundred nautical miles from Le Havre,
storm clouds a tight knot,
we start to roll.

Cabin fever unmasks the pacers,
ping-pong addicts,
the happy hour habitués.
Raucous voices echo
in every language but mine.

We take photographs of each other
radar equipment frozen out the tops of our heads.
We shiver in October winds,
try to look continental.

We read the ship's newspaper,
propaganda a week out of date.

Between courses of salad and fish
we weave fantasies
of lurking KGB transcribing our passports;
watching us.

In times of war
would Maritime Law
make us prisoners
headed for workcamps beyond Leningrad
a place in the Gulag?
We study the faces of the crew
searching for clues.

In the afternoon
the sea changes colour by the hour.
No suggestion of life sluices from the hull
as we rise and dip,
rocked by an unseen hand.

Janice Blue Zwarts