

The Magician and the Fool

A Drama in Three Acts

Tony Rothman

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Author's Preface

Where the truth leaves off and the fiction begins is, as usual, difficult to say. On the side of history, this play does concern two historical figures and all the identified characters did exist, usually in the roles assigned to them. Most of the major events in the play occurred, though how they occurred is another matter. Finally, for the cause of history, a fair bit of dialogue is adapted from the actual writings of the protagonists or from eye-witness accounts. On the side of fiction, times and places have been severely distorted or ignored altogether, and occasionally characters have been combined. Most of the dialogue has been freely invented -- after all, court stenographers and the secret police, then as now, were not everywhere. And finally, for the cause of fiction, there are some significant gaps in the historical record. The hyper-realistic details presented here to fill in the narrative are fabrications.

Fiction, of course, wins out in the end, if for no other reason than the intent of the play is not historical. Even if every individual element in the drama were factual, the whole would still be a phantasm. Call it "historical surrealism" if a category is required.

This is not to say the play cannot be taken as biographical. It can, but because the focus is on more general questions, the reader or theatergoer may find himself at the end almost as ignorant about the works of the heroes as he was at the beginning. Standard references may help remedy the situation. Or, if deemed necessary, the two prologues may be read on stage before curtain, printed, or ignored. — T.R.

CAST

ALEKSANDR SERGEYEVICH PUSHKIN: The historical Pushkin from ages 20 to 37. See portraits by Tropinin or Kipresnsky. Short, dark, long side whiskers. Quick movements bursting with energy.

EVARISTE GALOIS: The historical Galois from ages 17 to 20. Extant are only sketches done while he was a high-school student and by his brother Alfred sixteen years after his death. Short, thin, even wiry. Quick movements laced with paranoia.

AUGUSTE CHEVALIER: Galois' closest friend and schoolmate. The same age. Extraordinarily faithful, not bright, but occasionally stumbles on to a good point.

TZAR NIKOLAI I: "He has the most aristocratic physiognomy imaginable; he is despotism made man, the most irreproachable personification of absolute power...You can see that he is posing all the time; that he sees himself going by. Being constantly in uniform has stiffened his movements and given special significance to all his gestures. You might say that he is always under arms, and

that he never takes off his gorget.” -Lacroix as quoted by Troyat. Nonetheless, known to have been exceedingly sly with prisoners.

FORTUNE TELLER: Old and craggy, but no fool.

M. RICHARD: Galois’ mathematics teacher in secondary school. A competent mathematician.

NATALYA PUSHKINA (NATASHA): Only 18 when married, 12 years younger than Pushkin. Unfortunately, as dimwitted as she was beautiful. The 19th century equivalent of a sorority girl.

STEPHANIE DUMOTEL: Nothing is known about her except her name and that she was a doctor’s daughter.

SOLOGUB: A young count in his twenties. A fervent admirer of Pushkin.

IVAN IVANOVICH PUSCHIN (JEANEAU): Pushkin’s best friend from the lycée. Later sent to Siberia.

Plus: Friends, Republicans, Seconds, Prisoners, Dancers, Voices and Shadows.

NOTE: The play is constructed so that parts can be doubled and quadrupled. In particular, CHEVALIER and SOLOGUB should be played by the same actor. The same holds true for RICHARD and RASPAIL.

SOME NOTES

1. Music

There is a fair amount of music specified for use in the play, some of which is more crucial than others. To set the mood, I would suggest playing the second movement of the Brahms sextet in B-flat for strings before curtain. A suitable recording is the Menuhin et al.

2. Names

The pronunciation of some of the more unusual names is as follows:

Ábel: a as in "father."

Cáuchy: "Koashee" with the "oa" as in "goat."

Galóis: "Galwah."

Raspáil: silent 1.

The accent on many Russian names is not on the same syllable as expected in English. Thus:

Vladimir is "Vladéemir."

Boris is "Barées," the a as in "father."

Ivan is "EEván."

In all but the most formal conversation, the patronymics tend to become contracted:

Ivanovich becomes Ivan'ich.

Ivanovna becomes Ivantna, etc..

3. The Russian.

The Russian poetry is given in transliteration and, in the course of the action, a translation. The transliteration is not, and cannot be, accurate. The music will shine through if the Russian is learned. The original is also given in footnotes.

4. Sets.

The sets described tend to be “maximal.” One could probably do with nothing.

PROLOGUE ONE

Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin was Russia's greatest poet. He wrote approximately one thousand works, including *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, upon which Glinka based his opera; *The Stone Guest*, which became an opera by Dargomyshky; *The Bronze Horseman*, which became a ballet by Gliere; *Mozart and Salieri* and *Le Coq d'Or* which became operas by Rimsky-Korsakov; *The Queen of Spades* and *Evgeny Onegin*, which became operas by Tchaikovsky; and *Boris Godunov*, which served as the basis for Musorgsky's opera.

In Russia, innumerable parks, squares, museums, and theatres are named in his honor, not to mention several cities. There exists a four-volume dictionary which is nothing more than an index to Pushkin's vocabulary. He is the acknowledged creator of the modern Russian literary language, and it is said that he is among the five persons in all history about whom more has been written than any others.

PROLOGUE TWO

Evariste Galois was one of the greatest mathematicians of the nineteenth century. His was the first full expression of the theory of groups, which in the twentieth century has become the fundamental description of nature at its most basic level. Although the work of Galois concerned symmetries found in mathematical equations, these symmetries

are also found in snowflakes, crystals, and atoms. Modern theories of elementary particles and of the natural forces are theories of analogous symmetries and thus can be said to find their origins in the work of Galois and other pioneers. His collected works fill approximately sixty pages and until recently there was no biography of Galois in the English language.

ACT ONE

Scene One

A deserted street, out of time, out of place. Night. Enter two SHADOWS. Their forms ripple over the set but no corporeal entities are seen. Music is heard. The Martinu 1st symphony, slow movement. At the entrance of the piano the dialogue begins.

SHADOW 1: As you may know, our agents have been informed of a duel to
be fought tomorrow.

SHADOW 2: Ah yes. Are you suggesting we dispatch gendarmes to prevent it?

SHADOW 1: To the contrary, the duel involves the extremist who has been such a....ah
nuisance for so long. Several parties have approached us to suggest the best
course of action might well be...no action at all.

SHADOW 2: Your point is well taken. Perhaps if the gendarmes were sent
elsewhere...a mistake, of course...

SHADOW 1: Of course.

SHADOW 2: (As they disappear) Do you think that might be an expedient solution?

(Enter PUSHKIN from stage right and GALOIS from stage left. They are hurriedly walking in opposite directions and do not see each other. They collide at center stage, dropping the manuscripts each is carrying. In the ensuing scramble we hear a few words like:)

PUSHKIN: Izvenítye (Извините.)

GALOIS: Pardon.

PUSHKIN: Razhályusta (Пожалуйста.)

(They pick up the wrong papers and each continues to walk in the same direction as before.)

GALOIS: (After a few steps) Monsieur!

PUSHKIN: Oui?

GALOIS: I believe I have picked up your papers by mistake.

(They approach each other)

GALOIS: They don't look very similar, do they?

PUSHKIN: It's difficult to imagine how we confused them.

GALOIS: It must have been the drawings.

PUSHKIN: Yes, I see you doodle on your manuscripts also.

GALOIS: The style is remarkably similar.

PUSHKIN: Quite. Look at these two heads. they might have been relatives. Have you ever considered becoming an artist?

GALOIS: No, never, have you?

PUSHKIN: No, just a diversion. Boredom, you know.

GALOIS: Well, if you will excuse me, Monsieur, I must go. I am busy tonight.

(He turns to leave without having exchanged the papers.)

PUSHKIN: Young man, you have forgotten something.

GALOIS: Please forgive me, I am distracted this evening.

PUSHKIN: (As they exchange papers)

GALOIS:

By the way, what is this?

What language is this?

This?

Oh, this?

Russian.

Mathematics.

Poetry.

Algebra.

Mine.

Mine.

GALOIS: Poetry? Are you a poet?

PUSHKIN: Some would call me that. Are you a mathematician?

GALOIS: I would like to think so. Do you know, my father wrote poetry. I

occasionally write verses as well, but it isn't my talent.

L'eternal cypress m'environne;

Plus pale que le pale automme,

Je m'encline vers le tombeau.

PUSHKIN: (As if trying out the feel on his tongue)

Eternal cypress shades about me loom

More pallid than autumnal gloom,

My days, I know, approach the tomb.

GALOIS: It's not very good, is it?

PUSHKIN: I've done worse in my off moments.

GALOIS: It's not very cheerful either. I believe I have lost the ability to be cheerful.

PUSHKIN: Things aren't going well?

GALOIS: They could be better.

PUSHKIN: You certainly aren't very happy. What's wrong?

GALOIS: Tomorrow. An affaire d'honneur.

PUSHKIN: Ah, very good. I've had hundreds myself. The cause, if I may?

GALOIS: I'm not really sure. A woman. I called her a whore.

PUSHKIN: Was she?

GALOIS: There is, no question about it. I think.

PUSHKIN: Then she shouldn't have gotten upset.

GALOIS: One tends to forget logic in such situations.

PUSHKIN: I'd advise you to skip your affair of honor tomorrow.

GALOIS: There doesn't seem to be a way out. I told the seconds I wasn't interested but the other party refused to hear of it.

PUSHKIN: Then flee the country.

GALOIS: I have no money.

PUSHKIN: Here. (He rifles his pockets, coming up empty-handed.) Nothing. Poets feed off bread crumbs rather than gold pieces, I'm afraid...But it seems so ridiculous to risk your life over a woman you don't care for, doesn't it?

GALOIS: The height of ridiculousness.

PUSHKIN: Are you a good shot at least?

GALOIS: I've hardly ever fired a pistol in my life.

PUSHKIN: Hmm. May I offer some advice? If the limits are close, it may be advantageous to fire before your allotted steps. Then you may catch your opponent off guard. Is he a good shot?

GALOIS: I wish I knew.

PUSHKIN: Hmm. Then assume he shoots well. When receiving your shot, stand sideways toward him with your hand over your heart, like so. Is your duel in the morning?

(GALOIS nods)

Then see if you can arrange it so you aren't facing the sun. Also, be sure your powder has been kept dry overnight.

GALOIS: I don't have a pistol, yet alone powder.

PUSHKIN: I assure you, they are quite necessary in affairs of honor. You'd better get one.

GALOIS: You seem very knowledgeable about this sort of thing.

PUSHKIN: An expert.

GALOIS: Perhaps you could be my second tomorrow.

PUSHKIN: (Sighing) I'm afraid I have my own affaire d'honneur tomorrow.

GALOIS: A duel?

PUSHKIN: A duel.

GALOIS: A prostitute?

PUSHKIN: A wife.

GALOIS: A doctor's daughter, myself.

PUSHKIN: What?

GALOIS: Nothing. Tell me, did you care for her?

PUSHKIN: I think at one time I honestly did. But somehow the care got lost in the rest. I can't seem to find it now.

GALOIS: Doesn't it seem ridiculous to risk your life over a woman you don't care for?

PUSHKIN: The height of ridiculousness.

GALOIS: We're repeating ourselves. Tell me, how did you fall into such an enviable situation?

PUSHKIN: I believe it started some time ago...

(During the previous, the stage has been set for Scene II. The drawing room of NIKOLAI

IVANOVICH TURGENEV (not the Turgenev), circa 1819. TURGENEV,

about thirty, is sitting at a small, round table. Also sitting at the table is a

man called MASLOV who, like Turgenev, is about thirty. Pacing the room in

obvious agitation is IVAN IVANOVICH PUSCHIN, known as JEANEAU.

JEANEAU is about twenty. The scene fades in from the previous. PUSHKIN

exits at the start of the dialogue. GALOIS watches from his position

downstage.)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

TURGENEV: ...but you're his best friend, by God. What do you think?

JEANEAU: Yes, I'm his best friend, by God. That is the knot of the matter, isn't it, Turgenev? I am suspect as a link to him.

MASLOV: No one suspects you of anything . That is the knot of the matter. You are presently anonymous. We would like you to remain so, simply.

TURGENEV: Precisely.

JEANEAU: And yourselves as well?

MASLOV: That is understood.

JEANEAU: (Sighing) You know I would sooner cut of my right arm at the shoulder than divulge a secret common to us all.

MASLOV: Do all young men bask so in heroics?

JEANEAU: (Earnestly) But he must find out, as surely as the sun rises –

MASLOV: And in hyperbole?

JEANEAU: (Irritatedly) Once the damned journal is launched, Maslov -

TURGENEV: (Calmly) Once the damned journal is launched, Jeaneau, we will continue to remain anonymous.

JEANEAU: Sasha is not a blockhead, Nikolai Ivanovich. Even a blind man would see a change in my attitude toward him. Once the journal is out, two and two will be a difficult sum compared to connecting the three of us.

MASLOV: Not if you remain ah, discreet. And not if you don't get carried away by your metaphors.

JEANEAU: It would be easier to tell him now. He will find out soon enough in any case. Think of the benefits of having Sasha with us.

TURGENEV: Benefits. Hmph. I confess I don't see any. The Cricket may well be the greatest genius in Russia. For us, he would be the greatest disaster in Russia as well. With his diabolical gift for versifying, he is likely as not to scribble down all our names on a...a napkin during one of his drunken debauches:

Turgenev and Maslov, they fought the Tzar,

MASLOV: With Jeaneau and Delvig, they were removed afar

(They all laugh uneasily)

TURGENEV: And what will happen to this precious napkin? During one of his nightly excursions to the brothels, it will fall out of his pocket –

MASLOV: – to be picked up the next morning by the secret police.

TURGENEV: And pfff! The game isn't worth the candle. I tell you, the man has no control.

MASLOV: Nikolai Ivanovich is absolutely correct, you know. To Cricket, a revolution is – how shall I say it? – a soiree. One composes odes and shouts them from the rooftops. One rails at the Tzar in the name of Liberty, and in general makes a nuisance of oneself -

JEANE4U: Perhaps it is time we made nuisances of ourselves. The people need to be incited against censorship and slaughter and Sasha's poetry is doing more to incite them than anything written in the last ten years.

MASLOV: That is precisely the problem you don't seem to understand. Granted, the "Ode to Liberty" and "The Village" are full of color and clever rhymes. But when one gets right down to it, he is simply hurling insults at Tzar Aleksandr. And it is not yet the moment -

TURGENEV: – nor the method.

MASLOV: I think it would not be a bad idea for the Cricket to be shut up in Gottingen and fed for three years on milk soup and logic. "You, your throne I hate." "Arise, fallen slaves." Really, it could have come from a child.

TURGENEV: And children are dangerous.

JEANE4U: I resent that.

MASLOV: Resent what you like. His language is godsent; his sentiments are common to us all.

JEANE4U: Are we then all children?

MASLOV: Some children learn the wisdom of silence at an earlier age than others. Let him snipe the Tzar in public. Let him incite the masses.

TUGENEV: Let him deal with the secret police.

MASLOV: Let us proceed.

(A knock at the door)

TURGENEV: What the devil!

JEANEAU: I'll get it. (He goes to the door) Sasha!

(A very awkward as PUSHKIN enters the room with two "women of easy virtue".)

PUSHKIN: (Leaning over to JEANEAU) What are you up to? I've caught you at last!

JEANEAU: Nothing at all...just an informal evening...Come in.

PUSHKIN: Why didn't you tell me you knew Turgenev? Is this your secret society? Don't try to be mysterious, I beg of you. I assure you, it's quite absurd.

JEANEAU: Sasha, why don't you come in. Bring the lovely ladies as well Nikolai Ivanovich, you have some drinks I presume.

TURGENEV: (Disgruntled) I presume.

MASLOV: Such women in a gentleman's home. Unheard of.

(TURGENEV goes to fetch drinks. As he does so, the ladies seat themselves on a couch with MASLOV.)

JEANEAU: You know, Sasha, Nikolai Ivanovich doesn't approve of this behavior.

PUSHKIN: You know, Jeaneau, sometimes Nikolai Ivanovich is an ass of the most respectable convictions.

(TURGENEV returns, hands to glasses to JEANEAU and serves the remaining guests)

JEANEAU: Hmm. Turgenev's forty degree cognac. Very angry.

PUSHKIN: No rum?

JEANEAU: When there's no fish, a crawfish is a fish.

PUSHKIN: I'll drink the whole bottle at one. How much will you risk to see it. A ruble a kopek? (Takes a bottle)

TURGENEV: (Annoyed) Cricket, in my house you will behave! So as long as you've invaded, why not a verse for the occasion?

MASLOV: Splendid. Off the cuff. We know you can do it.

PUSHKIN: (Sighing) Of course. Cobblers make shoes to order; I fashion verses. Let me see, what would be appropriate...? Ah, I have it. "Good Advice"

Davaitye pit' i vyeselit'sa,

Davaitye zhiznyu igrat'.

Pust' chern clipaya suyetitsa,

Hye nam bezumnoi podrazhat'—

TURGENEV: "Let us drink and make merry." Really, Sasha, would it not be possible for more originality. "Let us play with life." Slightly better, actually.

MASLOV: "Let the blind crowd muddle on. Their mindlessness is not for us." I say,
some poet of the people.

JEANEAU: Let him finish, will you?

PUSHKIN: Thank you, Jeaneau.

Pust' nasha vetryenaya miadost'

Potonet v negye i vinye

Pust' izmenyaushaya radost'

Nam uli n etsa xot' vo snye.

TURGENEV: Dissipation! Unbridled dissipation!

MASLOV: "Let our stormy youth drown in comfort and wine. Let deceptive joy smile
at us, even if only in a dream." I suppose we must forgive him his lack of
years.

JEANEAU: No doubt you wish you were twenty again. Onward Cricket!

PUSHKIN: Kogda zhe unost' lekim dimom)

Umchit veselya unix dnye

Togda u starosti otimem

Vse chto otimetsa u nye. *

-
- The complete poem in Russian reads:

Давайте пить и веселиться,
Давайте жизнью играть.
Пусть чернь слепая суетится
Не нам безумной подражать.

(As the last lines conceivably contain sexual overtones, PUSHKIN should grab a woman)

TURGENEV: Not your best.

PUSHKIN: Not the best occasion.

MASLOV: Sex is lurking in everything you write. "When youth in a puff of smoke abandons the joys of carefree days, then from old age we will grab off her everything we can get."

(The WOMEN giggle)

An obscenity. Good advice indeed.

JEANEAU: (Chuckling) For a moment I did fear one of your bagatelles on syphilis.

PUSHKIN: If you wish. Kogdá- (Когда-)

JEANEAU: Spare us.

TURGENEV: Perhaps syphilis would not be a bad idea. The clap at least forced him to complete Ruslan and Ludmilla. Tell me, Sasha, are regular bouts with Venus your idea of playing with life?

JEANEAU: (With a hint of seriousness) Or death?

Пусть наша ветреная молодость
Потонет в неге и вине,
Пусть изменяющая радость
Нам улыбнётся хоть во сне.

Когда же юность лёгким дымом
Умчит веселья юных дней,
Тогда у старости отыщем
Всё, что отыметса у ней.

MASLOV: Can you win?

PUSHKIN: (Very tongue-in cheek) A discourse you request. Very well. Over death I cannot win; the trump is fixed. Therefore I do not oblige myself to worry about it. Over life, the game is even. In that battle I am heavily armed.

TURGENEV: As usual, you play with words, Sasha.

PUSHKIN: That's my job, isn't it?

TURGENEV: Not in entirety. I don't see any meaning.

PUSHKIN: A discourse isn't enough. Meaning you ask for. Profundity. Very well. I have a concrete proposal. The beautiful Semenova is playing the Queen of Sheba at the Grand Opera this week. I have fallen in love with her. She is ripe for abduction. The plan is as follows—

TURGENEV: Bozhe moi! (Боже мой!) Cricket, act your age.

MASLOV: He's just being difficult.

(Offstage singing in a Germanic language)

JEANEAU: What's that, do you hear it?

TURGENEV: Oh, it's no one, just the old gypsy who sells trinkets in the market.

MASLOV: The fortune teller?

TURGENEV: The same.

JEANEAU: Let's call her in.

(He goes to the window)

Grandmother! Have you got time for some divination?

VOICE: You'll make it worth the while?

JEANEAU: A ruble we'll promise; on posterity you'll take the chance. Come in.

(He goes to the door and ushers in an old GYPSY WOMAN)

Well now, who's to stake his destiny first? Cricket?

TURGENEV: Yes, Sasha, come on.

MASLOV: Yes, the choice is obvious.

PUSHKIN: (With a hint of nervousness) Why not? This should be fun. What do I do?

WOMAN: We need the table. Is this fine?

(PUSHKIN nods)

Sit.

(PUSHKIN sits as the others clear off the table. The WOMAN takes a small bundle of silk out of her pocket and unwraps it to reveal a deck of Tarot cards.)

Here, take the cards – gently mind you – like an infant. You have the spirit?

Good. Breathe the spirit into the cards. The cards must be you.

(She gives the cards to PUSHKIN and allows him to hold them for a moment)

Now – how do you say it? – mix them. Like so.

(PUSHKIN begins to shuffle cards)

Ah mal'chik, (мальчик) I see you have touched cards before, yes?

JEANEAU: Gambling is his second profession. (With a significant glance at the WOMEN) No, perhaps his third.

WOMAN: Have the cards ever read you before?

PUSHKIN: (Scoffing) Of course not. Life is to be lived, not read.

WOMAN: It is the thought of many. If you would rather not -

PUSHKIN: No, go on if it pleases you.

WOMAN: Very well. Will you pick a card to be you? A court card? Perhaps, my young stallion, you see yourself a king? The knight is it? Perhaps a card of the Major Arcana? It is to be (spreading her arms)... as you wish.

PUSHKIN: I really don't know what you are talking about. And I certainly wouldn't know what represents me. It's fantastical, really. Jeaneau, you pick one.

JEANEAU: For you? Well, if you insist.

PUSHKIN: I insist.

(JEANEAU takes the deck and, without looking, randomly picks a card. He hands it and the deck back to the WOMAN)

WOMAN: The Magician.

(She places the cards at the center of the table. As she continues talking, she deals out twelve cards, face up, in a circle around the Magician. She starts at 9 o'clock and proceeds

counter-clockwise. The cards are, in this order: 6 of pentacles; 8 of pentacles; 6 of wands (reversed, or top of card facing WOMAN); 4 of swords; 8 of cups; the Hanged Man; 3 of cups (reversed); 10 of swords; knight of wands (reversed); king of wands (reversed); the Sun; the Fool.)

I see I am dealing with an unusual young man, yes?

PUSHKIN: You are not obliged to say so – but it is true.

WOMAN: So, Magician, you travel by foot, forth and back, village to shire. You perform tricks – the actor, yes? – tell fortunes ,perhaps like granny herself. A magician is suspected by all, is it not true? A dangerous existence–

PUSHKIN: There is a certain adventure in living on the edge of disaster.

WOMAN: The Magician spreads ideas near and far that many find uncomfortable. There he holds the fire of Prometheus – a gift to mortals on earth

PUSHKIN: Oh ho, granny, you know the audience you play for. An extra five kopeks for this fortune.

WOMAN: (Ignoring the remark) But is it not further true, child, that the magician is half ...the charlatan? His cures quack remedies. Above his head the number one, you see it? One is the number of action, impetuous action. You take risks but do well not to deceive yourself.

PUSHKIN: Ah, you do not understand the pleasures of the gaming table.

WOMAN: The Magician has become like a god – this is true – but in doing so he has lost sight of his own soul.

PUSHKIN: Has he sold it?

WOMAN: I do not follow.

PUSHKIN: Surely the greatest gamble. Tell me, what will you wager that the cards turn a good fortune?

WOMAN: I am not the gambler.

PUSHKIN: The stakes, I'll double them.

WOMAN: It will do no good; the outcome is beyond me. The cards are spread.

PUSHKIN: So, the cards fix the future, is that it?

WOMAN: Fix? No, read. But what do they read? Do they read the clash of random forces, swirling about, drowning a man, this called destiny, though it is not? This is lack of destiny. Or do they read the will of a man, he who has ridden out the storm and chosen his own path? I do not know.

PUSHKIN: Unfortunate.

WOMAN: Why?

PUSHKIN: (With bravado) You see, I refuse to play the part of the buffoon even for God himself.

WOMAN: Do you wish me to continue?

PUSHKIN: Do not oblige yourself.

(WOMAN begins to pick up cards)

No, go on please.

WOMAN: Now we see the future. (She stares at the cards) There are many contradictions here. But – how can it be said? – the contradictions themselves are part of a larger unity.

PUSHKIN: Please be clear, grandmother.

WOMAN: All right. I will a little look. The first cards are propitious. The six of pentacles, called coins by some. And the eight of pentacles. You see, I think, the coins falling into waiting hands and next the apprentice working at a trade. The rewards are his for a job well done.

PUSHKIN: Very good. Money may be coming my way soon, is that it? And a job. No doubt a commission. Reading the cards is not so difficult. I'll outsmart you at your own game. (A pause.) Why are you frowning?

WOMAN: My quick student, the next step of the journey is not so pleasant. Here is the six of wands. Here is the victor on his horse, the garland crowning his head. But you see he rides upside down. This a victory is not, a defeat instead.

PUSHKIN: Trouble is it? Of what sort?

WOMAN: The six of wands is the card of travels. Perhaps you are to be–

PUSHKIN: –sent off?

WOMAN: This is possible. The next card, the four of swords, is often the card of imprisonment or exile.

PUSHKIN: So, my pen will catch up to me. I have been stupid. Well, no matter, I am weary with the noise of balls and turning morning into midnight. (The others present quietly make excuses among themselves, shake hands, and gradually steal away over the next few moments. PUSHKIN does not notice. When the others have left, enter GALOIS. He sits between WOMAN and PUSHKIN and watches)

WOMAN: Yes, the pattern becomes clear, like a crystal. Next, the eight of cups. You see, as I do, the traveler turning away from his past.

PUSHKIN: Following the four of swords?

WOMAN: Yes.

PUSHKIN: More of the same?

WOMAN: It could well be.

PUSHKIN: Do you mean a second exile?

WOMAN: A second exile. It is possible.

PUSHKIN: One exile too many. It's ridiculous. Change the fortune. I don't like it. What can I give you to prevent it? Will you bargain?

WOMAN: How can I strike the bargain?

PUSHKIN: Surely you. Isn't that your trade?

WOMAN: You confuse me, young man.

PUSHKIN: Do I? Well, no matter. It is all a poor man's drivel.

WOMAN: A second exile then. But perhaps it is to be spiritual.

PUSHKIN: Why do you say that?

WOMAN: To regain what the spirit has lost is necessary.

PUSHKIN: Be clear, I beg you. Your vagueness is that of a bad poet.

WOMAN: To regain the soul is the chance given to you by the next card.

PUSHKIN: You are bargaining.

WOMAN: No, I simply show you -

PUSHKIN: The Hanged Man! (Quietly) Am I to die?

WOMAN: An easy prediction, yes? No. Now I see in your life the great contradiction.

There is the Hanged Man; there, next to it, rests the card of love, spilled. I have seen you with the young women. In your many love affairs, love is lost.

PUSHKIN: I follow my feelings, grandmother. How is that false?

WOMAN: Unless it be the scorn of women, these are not feelings.

PUSHKIN: I do not understand.

WOMAN: You will not, Magician, unless you follow the Hanged Man:

(As in a trance)

I know that I hung

in the windy tree
for nine full nights
Wounded by the spear
Consecrated to Wotan
and offering to myself
on the tree
Whose roots are unknown.

PUSHKIN: Be clear woman! Must I ask you a third time? I dislike being toyed with. If you are threatening my life, out with it!

WOMAN: You do not, Magician, understand the Hanged Man. Voluntary is the sacrifice—you see the halo which circles his head. Magician, on the World Tree you must renounce the laws of man. There, after you have sacrificed yourself and have become one with the greater laws, then the self will be found; there will you regain what has been lost.

PUSHKIN: You are clever, grandmother. You would have me throw over my friends, women, and my career, for what – a soul? Is that your bargain? To sell me a soul? I see through you now. Your disguise is not clever enough.

WOMAN: My offer is only the Hanged Man. Someday you may understand.

PUSHKIN: Ah, this is tiresome; I've had enough.

WOMAN: There are five more cards.

(PUSHKIN freezes and stares at the table)

Do you wish that I should continue?

PUSHKIN: Yes. Go on.

WOMAN: There is trouble.

(PUSHKIN stares fixedly)

Yes, it is to be. The ten of swords is the worst of all cards.

A man pierced by ten swords cannot be read well.

(GALOIS covers the card with his hand. PUSHKIN removes Galois' hand and picks up the card)

PUSHKIN: Me?

WOMAN: It cannot be said. Great danger in your life, years from now. Ten, perhaps, fifteen, who knows.

PUSHKIN: Details! I must have details! The next cards, a knight, a king. These must be the clue. The knight on a horse—

WOMAN: A horseman, yes. The knight of wands, the king of wands, reversed the both. Trouble from the court of wands. The court of wands is fair-haired, it is always so.

PUSHKIN: A fair-haired man. The king? The Tzar? A powerful man? A powerful man with fair hair. Maybe white hair?

WOMAN: It is far away; we will have to wait and see.

PUSHKIN: (Pacing) So, one catastrophe after another. How can I prevent it? Should I avoid St. Petersburg? Yes, the north is harmful to me. Escape? But to where? Ah, it's preposterous. Horseman or horses. White-haired horses. Avoid the cavalry and the horseguardsmen. Ridiculous! Half my friends are in the cavalry. White-haired men. I'll be white-haired soon enough at this rate. There must a way—

WOMAN: If your roots are in the world of men, you will trip. If you have followed the Hanged Man and understood the self, the danger will be avoided. That is the only way—

PUSHKIN: The only way is to rid myself of fortune tellers. I say to you -

WOMAN: (Calmly) But you see, the Sun shines down on you. Great fame will be yours.

PUSHKIN: (Suddenly relieved) Good news at last. Well, we knew it had to be.

WOMAN: Yet, in fame, there is isolation; you see it. Here is a child basking in the garden of the Sun, but a wall separates him from the world of ordinary men.

PUSHKIN: Are all fortunes so hard to bear? You exile me once, then again, and yet a third time. You offer me nothing, grandmother, nothing except loneliness I have never felt so alone as I do now this I am cold. I do not like it. Where is this chill coming from? You! You have caused it! Let me be warm. Where are my friends? Has the devil taken them all? Does not a one of them stand by

me? What have you done with them, old woman? Begone, I will not be seduced!

WOMAN: One card still remains.

(PUSHKIN freezes. A long pause as each waits for the other)

PUSHKIN: Well?

WOMAN: The Fool.

PUSHKIN: (Laughing hysterically) The Fool? So, the outcome is clear.

WOMAN: No, it is...it is the Fool at the end of the journey. The expression is serene, yes serene. (Expansively) He has transformed the self, and in the self transformed, has transformed the world. The Fool ignores the precipice opening at his feet. He ignores the dog biting at his leg. All of them he ignores because he knows he will not be harmed. He is immortal. This is your reward, urodyvy (юродивый).

PUSHKIN: (Laughing nervously) You see, I am in a cold sweat over your obscurities. You see a defeated soldier and I am thrust into exile. A picture of a man hanging by his foot from a post becomes Wotan and the World Tree. You, grandmother, are better at weaving tales than myself. But your tales are defective. You have not even mentioned in your cards the coming revolution where we will all be—

WOMAN: No revolution for you, mal'chik (мальчик).

PUSHKIN: Ah, your crystal is fogged. My friends, I see, had the good sense to tire of this charade earlier. I, on the other hand, have been a fool to listen to this.

(He pays her) On your way.

(Exit WOMAN and GALOIS. PUSHKIN is alone. There is a knock on the door.)

PUSHKIN: Yes. (Enter a SERVANT)

PUSHKIN: Aleksandr Sergeevich?

PUSHKIN: I am he.

SERVANT: I passed your friends on the street. They said you would be here. My master told me to give you this.

PUSHKIN: And who is your master?

SERVANT: Korsakov, an old schoolmate of yours.

PUSHKIN: Of course. And what is this?

SERVANT: Money, Sir. A gambling debt he owed you. He asked me to bring it. Thank you.

(SERVANT bows and exits, leaving PUSHKIN alone. As the lights fade, the Gregorian chant, the Dies Irae, is heard. An orchestral chime accompaniment should be provided.

This may be a simple tolling. The chant continues through the opening of the next scene.)

ACT ONE

Scene Three

Center Stage should be occupied by a coffin. Around the periphery should be a table with some books to represent a study; a clerk's table and stool; a chair and a desk as might be found in front of a classroom; and a door to a house. Lines might be somewhat crooked, shadows marked, as in the manner of Dr. Caligari. In any case, the idea is to create an atmosphere of paranoia. The Dies Irae continues from Scene I. An offstage voice of a PRIEST is heard chanting in Latin and coming closer. GALOIS is sobbing at the coffin, center stage. PUSHKIN watches from the wings.

VOICE OF PRIEST : Inclína Dómine aurem tuam ad preces nostras, quibus misericórdiam
tuam súplices deprecámur: ut ánimam fámuli tui Nicholas Gabriel Galois,
quam de hoc saéculo –

(He walks on)

GALOIS: (Looking up) Bastard.

PRIEST: (After a pause) –saéculo migrare jussisti, in pacis ac lucis –

GALOIS: (Standing) Swine.

PRIEST: Evariste, I know you are grieving over the loss of your father. But in death,
one finds consolation-

GALOIS: You killed him.

PRIEST: Galois!

GALOIS: Bastard!

(He attacks the PRIEST who flees. GALOIS falls sobbing on the coffin)

Oh Father! My Father! What have they done...What have they done?

(Enter M. RICHARD, Galois' teacher, and stands by the desk representing the study)

RICHARD: Galois!

(GALOIS looks up)

Galois!

GALOIS: (Getting up and walking over to RICHARD) Yes, M. Richard?

RICHARD: Galois, I am so sorry, I I do not know how to express it. When I heard
what happened at Bourg-la-Reine, I shuddered in disbelief. I told myself,
"No, you are mad. The situation is impossible. There is nothing which could
have brought about such a pathetic situation."

GALOIS: (In a low voice) Yes, you will agree, it is always difficult to determine
precisely the forces at work in situation such as these, which tip the scales
one way or the opposite by an ever-so-slight imbalance. (Suddenly louder)

The Jesuits did it. The Jesuits and their Bourbon lackeys. I hold them responsible. All of them.

RICHARD: Grace, Galois. I would like to be more than your teacher; I should like to be your friend. But if I am to help you, I must find out what happened. As it stands, I know only that your father was Mayor of Bourg-la-Reine.

GALOIS: Yes, that is true, absolutely true, although one would not know it at the end. Yes, he opposed those stupid Bourbon rogues since their return after Waterloo. He opposed that gouted Louis and his senile brother now on the throne, that is to say, a lamb in dotage. Yes, his enemies have long tried to be rid of him. But no, he was too strong. They never succeeded in their infamous attempts until now, the wolves. Oh, Father!

RICHARD: Galois, perhaps we can talk about something else if you wish. Would you like me to send for your friend Auguste Chevalier? He has been asking about you. He is very worried.

GALOIS: No, I do not want to see Chevalier now.

RICHARD: (Trying to be cheerful) Well then I meant to ask you the paper you sent to the Academy of Sciences. What has happened to it? Have you received any word?

(GALOIS walks over to the CLERK, who is sitting at his desk)

GALOIS: M. Clerk, if you would be so kind, please tell me what has happened to the paper I sent here to the Institute two months ago.

CLERK: And what is your name, young man?

GALOIS: Evariste Galois, student at Louis-Le-Grand.

CLERK: Let me check the record. Un moment, excusez moi. (He rummages around)
Ah, voici une note. M. Fourier, our secretary, sent the manuscript on to M. Cauchy, in order that it be refereed.

GALOIS: Has it not come back, Sir?

CLERK: Certainement pas. M. Cauchy sends in three or four papers a week. But they are all his own work. It est prodigieux. If he sent a paper not his own, we would notice it as surely as we would notice a...a cat laying an egg.

GALOIS: Then I shall speak to M. Cauchy himself. Good-day Monsieur.

(GALOIS goes to the door. He knocks several times)

CAUCHY'S WIFE: Yes?

GALOIS: I would like to speak with M. Cauchy, if it is not inconvenient.

WIFE: He is an extremely busy man. Whom shall I say is calling, Monsieur?

GALOIS: Evariste Galois. He has a paper of mine.

WIFE: I will inquire. One moment, if you will excuse me.

(We hear an offstage prayer in Latin being interrupted. Then indistinct dialogue. WIFE returns.)

WIFE: M. Cauchy has taken ill. He has promised to present your very excellent paper to the Academy. Now, I am afraid I must say good-day.

(The door shuts)

GALOIS: (Walking back to RICHARD) One must try to understand Cauchy. It would be in bad taste not to give him the benefit of the doubt. He is, it is evident, the most pious of men who spends hours daily in communion with our Lord God, and who supports a dozen charities. He would have been content – one would suspect – to have been born, not a mathematician, but a Jesuit priest. He is a stinking bastard.

RICHARD: (Sighing) Let us hope you fare better with Cauchy than Abel did.

GALOIS: Who?

RICHARD: Look here.

(He hands GALOIS a journal)

GALOIS: (Reading) "On the resolution of algebraic equation One of the most interesting problems of algebra is that of the algebraic solution of equations...Beyond the fourth degree, no method has ever been found to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for the solution of any algebraic equation, despite the work of generations of mathematicians...

(GALOIS scans the paper with mounting excitement) I must see this Abel.

We are working in the same direction. Where can I reach him?

RICHARD: He is dead.

GALOIS: What! How?

RICHARD: Consumption, age 27. He too sent a paper to M. Cauchy. What happened...I don't know. But Abel was not offered a position and is dead.

GALOIS: The methods of Cauchy and his Jesuit friends are becoming clear. Does one forge coincidences in the mind, or does Cauchy forge them for us? The death of Abel is one which will rest on his conscience. The death of my father...They forged those letters, the bastards, they forged them. I have not a single doubt.

RICHARD: What are you talking about, Galois? What letters?

GALOIS: My father wrote poetry. Epigrams mostly. You would be forced to concede he was very clever. Yes, he was extremely witty. But he didn't write those, ~ swear it. Only stupid, arrogant fools would think otherwise.

RICHARD: Galois, my boy, do not talk about it if you hurt so. We should we should prepare you for your glorious career at the Polytechnique.

GALOIS: I will not be attending the Polytechnique.

RICHARD: Why not?

EXAMINER: (Calling out) Candidate number eleven, Evariste Galois! Please step forward.

(GALOIS walks over to the examiner. PUSHKIN steps up to the blackboard)

EXAMINER: Hmm, Evariste Galois, student at Louis-Le-Grand. "A discipline problem but shows extraordinary aptitude for mathematics." Don't they all. Well, we shall see how extraordinary. M. Galois, why don't you demonstrate some of this extraordinary knowledge? Tell me something about, shall we say, the theory of logarithms.

(GALOIS writes something, very rapidly, with stacatto motions, on a blackboard, real or imaginary, PUSHKIN watches with interest)

GALOIS: Voila!

EXAMINER: (Squinting) This is unusual. What have we here?

GALOIS: You see, I have written both an arithmetic and a geometric progression. The terms in the arithmetic progression are the logarithms of the corresponding terms in the geometric progression.

EXAMINER: (Showing interest) Yes, what next?

GALOIS: (Shrugging) And so on.

EXAMINER: Young man, I will not draw answers from you by the sword.

GALOIS: (Writing again and speaking extremely fast) Between any two numbers of the geometric progression, one may insert $(n-1)$ numbers and $(m-1)$ numbers between two terms of the arithmetic progression.

EXAMINER: In different intervals?

GALOIS: By all means, Sir.

EXAMINER: And what will be the result?

GALOIS: Is it not obvious to you, Sir?

EXAMINER: Suppose, Sir, that it is not. Suppose I wish you to explain it to me. And suppose I tell you that if you do not succeed in explaining to me this small and trivial matter, you will fail in your examination. What then, M. Candidate, would be your answer to my question?

GALOIS: This, Sir!

(PUSHKIN hands GALOIS a rag and GALOIS hurls it at EXAMINER. EXAMINER falls ofA the chair. GALOIS then walks back to M. RICHARD.)

GALOIS: I threw an eraser at him.

RICHARD: A direct hit, I fear.

GALOIS: Was there any other possibility? You know I work too much in my head for those snails to follow.

RICHARD: Ah, does no one see?

GALOIS: Why should one dare hope? Are not hierarchies a means for the inferior, an artificial means by which the inferior can convince themselves of their worth? The examiner – as a member of the hierarchy, you understand – had convinced himself of his superiority. Nonetheless, he remained an idiot. M. Cauchy, as a member of the hierarchy, is not guilty when he forgets my paper, or Abel's. His is not required to see that Abel's life was at stake. The Jesuits are also secure. After all, is not Catholicism the official religion of France? Is it not safe for a filthy priest to sign my father's name to malicious epigrams and cause his suicide? It is even safe for the coward to preside over my father's funeral.

RICHARD: Oh, I am sorry, Galois. I did not realize.

GALOIS: No one ever admits to realizing. They go out of their way to blind themselves. But they know, underneath they know.

RICHARD: You must not think that, Galois.

GALOIS: How is one to think otherwise?

RICHARD: Cauchy is the greatest mathematician in France. He has promised to present your paper to the Academy -

GALOIS: He should have done it already.

RICHARD: You expect too much of mortals. We are all mortals, Galois. If I were your malicious enemy and sent to all those at Louis-LeGrand a poem, signed by

you, making stupid asses of them all, would it be enough to make you kill yourself, or would you laugh it off?

(Optional: PUSHKIN reads an appropriate limerick, e.g.

There once was a butcher at La-Reine
Who frolicked with pink Bourbon swine.
They wallowed by day,
He figured by night,
Until he sold them for bacon.)

GALOIS: The citizens who received those forged poems did not laugh it off, as you would wish. For two years, they tried, again and again to drive my father from Bourg-La-Reine. How is one to imagine living for two years when the entire town, even the entire country, has decided you are a madman?

RICHARD: I...I hope to God you exaggerate. To quench your life in such a miserable piece of slander...it can only be the sign of much deeper troubles. Is that not so obvious as to be a platitude?

GALOIS: What has become obvious to me is that we are the victims of a vicious hierarchy. The Jesuits are part of that hierarchy. Have not they convinced Louis himself that the public press should be abolished? That there should be but a single newspaper sponsored by the King and edited by the Chief of Police? Have they not passed a law which punishes profanation of our

beloved Host on a par with murder? Ou' ils aillent au diable et Dieu avec eux. No, M. Richard, as long as the Jesuits and the Bourbons remain in power, the Chatre will remain a mockery and the situation will remain exactly the same.

RICHARD: You are talking like a Republican, Galois.

GALOIS: (Reflectively) Yes, I suppose I am.

RICHARD: If you talk of sedition, I must refuse to hear you.

GALOIS: Then you refuse to hear the truth. You ask, "Where is the path?" One seeks a civilized route to existence, free from the necessity of battling nameless enemies who hide as cowards behind the mediocrity of their rusted institutions. One dares hope for a time when people will work together instead of arrogantly suppressing the thoughts of anyone who disagrees. Your brain ties itself into knots to find a reasonable path to such a world...But always, in the end, you arrive at the same answer –

RICHARD: Do not say the word.

GALOIS: – revolution.

RICHARD: M. Galois, you could be arrested for what you have just told me. This conversation must be terminated, as well as our relationship. But let me tell you one thing as your friend and your teacher: You are a great mathematician, perhaps the greatest of the century. Your revolution is of the

mind, not of the streets. Do not forget that in your haste to topple the government or you will trip.

GALOIS: (Moving away from M. RICHARD) M. Richard, I may be a mathematician, but I am also a man.

RICHARD: No, Evariste, you are still a boy.

GALOIS: (Turning away and catching sight of the coffin) Oh Father!

As the lights dim, PUSHKIN approaches GALOIS and they walk together downstage. In the meantime, the stage is set for Scene IV. A clearing in the woods. Two SECONDS enter, talking among themselves.

PUSHKIN: You might have listened to his advice, saved yourself a bit of trouble.

GALOIS: It was not the time.

PUSHKIN: For what, if I may?

GALOIS: For science.

PUSHKIN: Something about equations, wasn't it?

GALOIS: "Something." The most difficult question of the age – under what conditions can an equation be solved? For three hundred years the puzzle has confounded the best minds in the world -

PUSHKIN: The best? I feel slighted.

GALOIS: Don't take offense. But what good are such investigations when the country is ruled by tyrants and the people are denied even the right to read –

PUSHKIN: – even poetry. Especially poetry. Especially my poetry. Yes..., there was only one other path to glory...and we would follow it. (PUSHKIN marches off) It was our fate to rouse the masses and lead the –

ACT ONE

Scene Four

SECOND 1: – revolution. How does Pushkin expect to fight a revolution two thousand
versts from St. Petersburg?

SECOND 2: Does he expect to fight?

S1: (Sighing) Only to incite.

S2: To conspire?

S1: Please, to inspire.

S2: The role is exalted.

S1: I believe it's faulted.

S2: I'm tempted to continue the rhyme.

S1: Enough, it's less than sublime.

S2: Yes, I see. He truly won't conspire?

S1: Only inspire.

S2: Not fight?

S1: Please, to in – (Stops, glowering)

S2: Quite.

S1: Is it not clear? Conspiracy is for conventionalists.

S2: Academics.

S1: Correct. Ignited by his verse, Pushkin expects the revolution to condense out of thin air –

S2: – like a whirlwind? –

S1: – and revolve around him as centerpiece. He will not budge -

S2: Not an inch?

S1: Not the width of a barley corn. And why should he?

S2: Yes, why should he?

S1: Is not the revolution, indeed all history, merely ink from the pen of the master poet?

S2: His creation seems to have gone awry.

S1: Awry? No. A necessary plot turn. Tension. Suspense.

S2: Oh, the plot. I see. The bard writes subversive poetry.

S1: Shouting in a packed theatre, “Now is the most secure time, for the ice float on the Neva!” is a serious slip.

S2: He is ordered to report to the Tzar.

S1: Really, poets are not held in such high esteem.

S2: Ah, to General Miloradovich.

S1: A more appropriate level.

S2: To clear his name, Pushkin shows him everything.

S1: Pushkin has burned everything.

S2: Hmm He recites! All the dangerous verses from memory!

S1: Approximately.

S2: The general is impressed.

S1: (Ironically) Overwhelmed by genius and honesty.

S2: So Pushkin is pardoned!

S1: Pushkin is exiled.

S2: (Deflated) By the Tzar?

S1: All expenses paid, 1000 rubles for the trip, an official stipend, a government post.

S2: It's not quite the denouement I expected. Where does he end up?

(SECOND ONE points to the ground)

Oh yes.

S1: Perhaps it is time we got down to business.

S2: Twenty paces?

S1: Only for Frenchmen. Ten.

S2: A volanté?

S1: Done.

(From center stage, they pace off five steps apiece and drop two jackets to mark the firing limits. Each paces off an additional five steps. There are now 20 paces between them. They

stop, turn toward each other, slowly walk back to the firing limits and pretend to shoot one another.)

S2: (Clutching his heart in mock agony) The cause? Another Duchess?

S1: (Flatly) Your fantasy.

S2: A princess at least?

S1: You're a romantic.

S2: Pushkin as well.

S1: As well? He's not well.

S2: Clapped up?

S1: Certainly not shut up.

S2: Surely in exile –?

S1: Not a chance. Have you seen "The Dagger?"

S2: Not a glint.

S1: "The secret guard of freedom, avenging dagger, The final judge of shame and offense."

S2: He offended a countess!

S1: (Annoyed) You've only sex on the brain.

S2: (Guessing) Well, if not a woman, then –

S1: – the root of all evil.

S2: Women?

S1: No, the cause.

S2: Ah yes, I had forgotten. Oh, I see: avarice. Money. A gambling debt. His?

S1: Ambiguous.

S2: His opponent's?

S1: Ambiguous, as I said.

S2: Nonetheless, someone must have offended him.

S1: Also ambiguous.

S2: Gospodi! (Господи!) There must be another party. It stands to reason.

S1: (A little annoyed) It does indeed. You're his second...Zubov.

S2: (Pensively) Yes, I recall...(Startled) But what the devil! They're friends. I don't understand.

S1: There's nothing to understand. Pushkin has accused Zubov of cheating at baccarat. Pushkin was losing – as usual.

S2: Then the debt is ambiguous.

S1: (Yawning) As I said.

S2: Zubov challenged?

S1: As you know.

S2: I don't understand.

S1: As I predicted. If you want a deeper explanation, as God; maybe he's listening.

(Enter ZUBOV)

ZUBOV: Well?

S1: We're waiting. S2: (To himself) I don't understand.

(SECOND 2 hands ZUBOV a pistol. ZUBOV takes his place at extreme stage left, about where SECOND 2 finished pacing off his full ten paces. An awkward silence as the three men wait for PUSHKIN. Soon, enter PUSHKIN, stage right, eating a bunch of cherries. He spits out the stones in the direction of ZUBOV. SECOND 1 offers PUSHKIN a pistol. He takes it, and offers SECOND 1 some cherries.)

S1: (Refusing) Cherries?

(PUSHKIN, still eating cherries, walks to stage right and faces ZUBOV. He continues to eat and spit stones in ZUBOV's direction.)

S1: Advance!

(PUSHKIN does not move. He continues to eat cherries. ZUBOV advances to the firing limits, aims and fires. He misses. He turns sideways to PUSHKIN, with his hand over his heart, stands erect, and waits for the return shot. PUSHKIN continues to eat cherries. ZUBOV, relieved, runs to PUSHKIN, and embraces him.)

ZUBOV: My dear friend!

(PUSHKIN does not reply.)

S2: I don't understand.

(Exit ZUBOV AND SECOND 2, puzzled.)

S1: Let's see, you're depressed after a year of exile in the Crimea and you want to end it all. No, too simplistic. You think that in order to prove yourself a man, you must expose yourself to all conceivable dangers...Too trite...Ah, you're collecting material for a new story. Because no one would believe such a tale you decided to conduct research in vivo – for realism. Realism? Do you call this real? Who would believe this scene? Pushkin, say a word, I beg of you. Say at least, "I don't deign to explain myself to mere mortals such as yourself." An enigma, you. No. No enigma at all. Rather a stance. An image you need to project to your public. Not even an original image, mind you. Byron copied. Does it increase sales? Pushkin, speak!

(No response.)

(SECOND turns away. Still no response from PUSHKIN)

Are you so convinced of your omnipotence?

(No response)

Or do you hate yourself so much? (He exits leaving PUSHKIN to eat his cherries.)

ACT ONE

Scene Five

During the previous scene, GALOIS has dressed himself in the uniform of the National

Artillery Guard. PUSHKIN remains standing as the scene changed.

Downstage is a tall step ladder or even better, a tall see-saw. Upstage is a banquet hall, unlit. People gradually filter in and seat themselves at the banquet tables. GALOIS approaches PUSHKIN.

GALOIS: Your path leads in circles. An effective method for leading a revolution indeed. If you had stayed in Petersburg –

PUSHKIN: I'd likely have been shot.

GALOIS: You seem intent on that anyway.

PUSHKIN: Being gunned down by a firing squad is a bore. Tempting fate, on the other hand, contains an element of...(gesturing) the transcendental – we are permitted a glimpse of the infinite.

GALOIS: What's needed here is an element of practicality.

PUSHKIN: Ah yes, the rational mathematician. Well, professor, I am all ears. Some lessons in the practical art of fighting a revolution, if you please.

GALOIS: (Sighing) There is a problem.

PUSHKIN: Yes?

GALOIS: (Climbing up one side of the see-saw) You see, I missed the revolution.

When July came by and the barricades were thrown up in the streets, I was scaling the University walls...But their height was far greater than my own and I was soundly defeated. (He slides down)

PUSHKIN: A simple question: why didn't you use the door?

GALOIS (Climbing again) Because I was locked within by the treacherous Director who, after the fighting was done and upon seeing the royalists defeated, appeared the next day wearing our tricolor cockade. A royalist is at least pitiable; a traitor to his own cause is despicable.

(Enter CHEVALIER)

CHEVALIER: Remember, Galois, you were expelled for saying as much.

GALOIS: So?

CHEVALIER: Was it necessary? Your fellow students saw fit to remain in silence, finally speak out against you.

GALOIS: (Balancing on top of the see-saw and angrily) Chevalier, my fellow students were cowards afraid to speak the truth. But truth is a demand, not a pleasure to be taken as one...

PUSHKIN: ... sips wine.

GALOIS: Exactly.

CHEVALIER: Then why did you wait five months before speaking out yourself?

GALOIS: (A little flustered) It...the situation did not arise until the... the director claimed credit for his fictitious heroics during July. But yes, you are correct. It is unfortunate I was expelled only after the fighting and not before.

CHEVALIER: I cannot argue with you, Galois. At least you should be grateful you did not die on the streets. That which you hoped for has been accomplished: the Bourbon white is extinguished; the tricolor has been raised; Louis-Philippe has repealed the ordinances. I am a little lost, Galois, what else is it that you want?

GALOIS: Put in its most precise mathematical terms, Chevalier, I desire a republic. That is why I am a Republican.

CHEVALIER: Shh, Galois. This is a dangerous place to speak so.

GALOIS: To the contrary, we are among friends –

GALOIS: – and police.

GALOIS: Chevalier, this is a celebration.

CHEVALIER: Every Republican in Paris must be here, I think.

(The banquet hall is lit up. The impression must be given of many people. GALOIS slides down the other side of teeter-totter)

GALOIS: Of course, as it is a celebration of the acquittal of 19 republicans on conspiracy charges, we might expect Republicans to be in attendance.

CHEVALIER: But the police will have agents here tonight. And your uniform. The

Artillery Guard has been abolished –

GALOIS: –as a haven for murderous Republicans.

CHEVALIER: It is illegal to be dressed so. You had better be careful, Galois.

GALOIS: Chevalier, my faithful friend, you are not invited anyway. I'd suggest you leave immediately if you are so easily frightened.

CHEVALIER: Promise me at least that you will come to our meeting on Sunday. The family would accept you, I am certain they would.

GALOIS: There is not a doubt. The St. Simonians would accept their own worst enemy. All men are brothers, isn't that it? "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall enjoy peace." One asks oneself for the source of such profundity.

CHEVALIER: We shall bear our cross, as Christ bore his.

GALOIS: Please, Chevalier, spare me your crucifixion.

CHEVALIER: We will accept even atheists.

GALOIS: Even atheist mathematicians? A double damnation, I am sure.

CHEVALIER: Galois, I never know whether you are mocking me or yourself.

GALOIS: (After a pause) Why do you worry about me so, Chevalier?

CHEVALIER: Because you are my friend. That which is most dear to me on earth is your friendship. (GALOIS shakes his head) Do you know, St. Simon was very concerned with mathematicians?

GALOIS: Really, I am surprised.

CHEVALIER: Yes, he held a great concern for the intellectual. In his very first work, St.

Simon addressed himself to the savant. He had a wonderful idea. He proposed to open a subscription before the tomb of Newton. Everyone, men and women, rich and poor, would contribute what he could in money, clothes, food –

GALOIS: Yes, I see it clearly: sitting beneath the effigy of Newton – a basket of cucumbers.

CHEVALIER: Hear me out, Galois. Each person would name 21 savants: three mathematicians, three physicians, three chemists, three physiologists, three men of letters, three painters, and three musicians. The twenty- one who received the most votes would band together under the title The Council of Newton, divide the subscription among themselves, and become the spiritual leaders of the entire world. And did you realize, St. Simon further decided that only a mathematician could be elected to preside over the Council.

GALOIS: The only thing lacking in that program is an ounce of intelligence.

CHEVALIER: I must admit, St. Simon did abandon the proposal. But he had other ideas – (Enter RASPAIL, dressed in the uniform of the Artillery Guard. He is expostulating in a grand manner to a few followers.)

RASPAIL: Look at the Artillery Guard. Its members are so convinced of the reactionary tendencies of the government, that the most enlightened of them have blushed whenever they donned their uniforms. Now that the Guard has been abolished, its uniform will become a symbol, not of this reactionary government, but of freedom-loving people. I shall wear my uniform openly, enter the arena, and fight the King's justice.

(Enter DUMAS.)

DUMAS: Ah, Greetings, Citizen Raspail.

RASPAIL: Greetings, Citizen Dumas. How is your new play coming?

DUMAS: (As they seat themselves) With my facile ability to write, I must guard against becoming superficial....

CHEVALIER: (Who has been talking to GALOIS all this time) In St. Simon's opinion, the religious power is that which, embracing all of humanity in all that which constitutes its ...um, essence, and should guide it toward that...that which forms the true aim and scope of...of Christianity: the amelioration of the lot of the most numerous. Do you see what I am trying to say, Galois?

GALOIS: (Withdrawing a dagger from his uniform and displaying between the tip of his forefingers) Take note of this dagger, Chevalier. Observe that if I spin it once about the point, 180 degrees, the face it presents looks exactly like the face it presented to us at the start. What do we conclude from this?

CHEVALIER: That a double-edged knife cuts in both directions?

GALOIS: That a group of permutations exists which leaves the form of the dagger invariant.

CHEVALIER: I was never very good at parables.

GALOIS: Now, suppose I flip the knife over once, end for end. Observe that the tip of the blade and pommel have reversed position. What do we say about this?

CHEVALIER: That the point is difficult to find?

GALOIS: That this operation does not leave the form of the knife invariant.

CHEVALIER: Are you speaking of the dangers of holding a knife by the wrong end?

GALOIS: I am speaking of pure analysis. I am speaking of the roots of algebraic equations.

CHEVALIER: I don't follow.

GALOIS: And that is why I am not a Simonian, nor you a mathematician. Now, my friend, you must go. This is no place for you. Au revoir.

(Exit CHEVALIER. GALOIS and PUSHKIN enter the banquet hall)

A VOICE: Galois! Over here!

GALOIS: Good to see you. Is it Gervais, the medical student?

GERVAIS: Yes, we met last year at a demonstration.

(PUSHKIN and GALOIS seat themselves next to GERVAIS)

GALOIS: How are your studies going?

GERVAIS: I began working on my cadaver this week. A pity the specimen is so old, but young ones are almost impossible to come by these days. You're late. The chicken is very good. Try some. It's a little hard to cut. Have some wine. Are you at the Polytechnique.

GALOIS: No, I was at the University.

GERVAIS: L'école Normale ? I am surprised. But no longer.

GALOIS: No longer.

GERVAIS: Too bad. How did your paper fare at the Academy? Something on equations, wasn't it?

GALOIS: Yes, it is difficult to know precisely what happened. One asks where there exists a situation which is not difficult to understand, something clear cut. Cauchy got sick.

GERVAIS: Ah yes, the great man. He fled the country with the Bourbons, didn't he?

GALOIS: It is a good thing for him, too. I submitted a second paper over a year ago. After numerous inquiries, I discovered it had been sent to Fourier. For some inexplicable reason, unfathomable to anyone of my good nature, I never heard anything at all.

GERVAIS: Fourier died. Haven't you heard?

GALOIS: It is a good thing for him, too. I sent a third paper three months ago. Poisson has the manuscript of this occasion. I have written to him, demanding to

know whether he plans to publish the paper or not. We will see what tortuous excuses the Academy will concoct this time in their efforts to preserve themselves in their well-spun cobwebs, specimens of feeble mindedness and arrogance. If Poisson uses as an excuse that he has died, use him as your next cadaver.

PUSHKIN: (Jovially) Why don't you have some more wine? It's a very good burgundy.

CROWD: Raspail! Raspail! A toast from Citizen Raspail! Raspail who refused the Legion of Honor! The great Republican Raspail!

RASPAIL: (Standing) To old age! Our youth has seen oppression. May we live to become gray and feeble in the land of our dreams!

CROWD: Bravo!
etc.

GALOIS: Raspail is very good, I am obliged to say. But surely we can do better. I have a toast. (Begins to stand)

GERVAIS: (Pulling GALOIS down) Sit down, Galois. I don't think you are in the proper frame of mind. This is a celebration, remember? Here, tell me something about mathematics. Why are you attracted to it?

GALOIS: Because...it is clean.

GERVAIS: I don't understand.

GALOIS: In science, opinions do not count for anything; the subject will not reward this or that view in politics or religion.

GERVAIS: From your remarks about the Academy, I would guess you are quite mistaken.

GALOIS: You do not speak of science; you speak of human beings. You speak of filth.

CROWD: Dumas! Dumas!

DUMAS: (Rising) To art! For the paintbrush and the pen contribute as effectively as the rifle and the sword to the social regeneration to which we have dedicated our lives, and for which we are prepared to die!

CROWD: Bravo Dumas! etc.

(PUSHKIN shakes DUMAS's hand)

GALOIS: Really, we must have a toast to Louis-Philippe. What is all this art business anyway?

GERVAIS: Galois, don't be a fool. You'll only get yourself into trouble. If you toast Louis-Philippe here, the crowd will slit your throat.

GALOIS: I didn't mean that sort of a toast.

PUSHKIN: In either case, my friend, you should learn to hold your liquor. Always eat when you drink. And if you want to get yourself killed, at least do it for a cause, not over a bottle of wine.

CROWD: Arago! Arago! The great scientist, Professor Arago!

ARAGO: (Rising) To the sun of 1831! May she be as warm as the sun of 1830, but not
dazzle us as that one did!

CROWD: Hurrah Arago!
etc.

(Suddenly, GALOIS climbs up on the table with his glass of wine in his left hand. He pulls
out his dagger with his right hand and pours the wine over the blade.)

GALOIS: To Louis-Philippe!

(CROWD immediately silences)

PUSHKIN: Get down you idiot!

GERVAIS: Do you want to get us all arrested?

GALOIS: (Brandishing dagger) To Louis-Philippe!

DUMAS: (To RASPAIL) It will not be safe her for long. We'd better get out.

(There is general confusion. Some banqueters, including RASPAIL, DUMAS, and
GERVAIS, make a hasty exit. Others begin to imitate GALOIS.)

GALOIS: To Louis-Philippe!

(Eventually, the CROWD exits, leaving GALOIS standing on the table. Only
PUSHKIN is left seated. After a long pause, PUSHKIN gets up, eating a leg
of chicken, and walks downstage)

PUSHKIN: What we need here is an element of practicality.

GALOIS: I suppose you have a point. We don't seem to be getting anywhere.

PUSHKIN: Well, you know how it is. You should learn to control yourself. Otherwise I
fear for your life. (Reciting:)

I saw death; she sat

upon my quiet threshold.

I saw my coffin; its door opened

and to it flew my hope.

I will die – the empty traces of my youth

will go unnoticed

And my eyes' last glance

will go unmet.

GALOIS: I believe things are going poorly enough without such sentiments. It seems
to me you had your own revolution to fight. Get on with it.

PUSHKIN: After a short intermission.

End ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One

PUSHKIN and GALOIS are downstage. The stage is dominated by the Tzar's study in the Winter Palace. The study should be somewhat upstage and can be made as elaborate as desired. It should have at least a large fireplace. Downstage, to one corner, should be a snowdrift and, if possible, some indication of a fortress wall. NIKOLA II, the Emperor of All Russia, is standing in his study. Two men, and unnamed SOLDIER and LUNIN pace the snow drift, which also holds a few corpses.

GALOIS: Back again. Can't seem to get away, can we? You were about to explain how you found the path to freedom, both inner and outer, by leading the revolution.

PUSHKIN: I? I was in exile.

GALOIS: Well, then explain how the revolution led itself.

PUSHKIN: That is the problem with revolutions, isn't it? We think we are in control when in reality... The situation was somewhat confused. Tzar Aleksandr died, God bless his orthodox soul. His younger brother Konstantin was heir apparent, but unbeknownst to even the royal family, he had secretly

abdicated years earlier. The third brother Nikolai steps in at the last minute, as bewildered as everyone else. An usurper. The time is ripe for revolt...

(The distant sounds of guns and shouts. Exit PUSHKIN. GALOIS joins the men in the snow drift, takes some paper out of his shirt and begins to write.)

NIKOLAI: So, my brother Konstantin, your wishes are fulfilled. I am Emperor. But at what a price! My subjects' blood has been spilled. A terrible example to expose the most horrible of plots. Konstantin! To give up the throne of Russia for a Polish woman! God help us, this is a cold December.

SOLDIER: A fine revolution this turned out to be, brother. And I'll tell you, it's no wonder - half our damned leaders vanishing into the night - poof!

LUNIN: Perhaps they decided we needed more rehearsal. Waiting for eight hours as we faced the Tzar's muskets did point up a lack of split-second timing.

SOLDIER: (Addressing a corpse) Eh, brother, did you hear that? It was only a dress rehearsal. No need to act so convincing.

LUNIN: You must admit, the Tzar's cavalry slipping on the ice did provide a proper measure of comic relief.

SOLDIER: I know how it fell. Last night, they sit around a cozy fire. The first says, "Regicide. Murder the Tzar." The second says, "Eh, blockhead, too dangerous. Do you want your turbulent head cut off?" The third holds forth: "*Bátushka* (БАТЮШКА), no need for violence. Just foist a constitution on him." Round and round they go. The little sun peeks up its head. Do they notice? Hah! The damned fools miss their own revolution!

LUNIN: And tell me, what are your aspirations?

SOLDIER: Right now? Let Nikolai be the bloody Tzar; give me some hot borsch (борщ). You lied. Aleksandr knocks off and you tell us Nikolai snatches the throne from the other brother. An usurper you call him. The whole Moscow regiment risks their bloody necks in a mutiny against the rightful Tzar. Why? Because you tell us Nikolai has thrown his bloody brother Konstantin into the bloody pit.

LUNIN: I, my good fellow, said nothing. I am merely a subordinate. Nonetheless, it was a useful expedient.

SOLDIER: I see now, *bátushka*. Confusion reigns the land. The time is ripe for revolt. You need a slogan. "Overthrow the usurper! you proclaim.

LUNIN: Decidedly more appeal than, "Save Konstantin the hen-pecked."

NIKOLAI: I do not understand. How could they be so ungrateful? Not peasants, nor serfs, but their owners: Princes, Counts, the wealthy, the highest of the aristocracy. I gave them everything. What do they want from me-?

GALUIS: *Liberté égalité ou mort.*

NIKOLAI: There must be a solution. They should all be drafted into the army. In the army exists order, no impertinent claims to know all the answers; no one commands before he himself has learned how to obey. These youth lack discipline; they lack religion. They forget God is the Supreme Commander. They forget...

(Enter COUNT BENKENDORF)

COUNT: Are you ready to continue the interrogations, Your Majesty?

NIKOLAI: What, still more? Who is it this time?

COUNT: Lunin, the St. Simonian. A vile nuisance, Your Majesty.

SOLDIER: And what do you want, Lunin?

LUNIN: I? I desire the complete reorganization of society by scientists and industrialists. A scientific division of labor will result in spontaneous social harmony. We will produce universal brotherhood by the scientific method.

SOLDIER: The man is mad. No wonder the blasted revolution pancaked.

COUNT: Conspirator Lunin!

(LUNIN is taken before the TZAR)

SOLDIER: (Calling after LUNIN) Lunin, do you know what your revolution is? It's damned web, a web in which everyone gets caught and no one escapes. Spontaneous social harmony! Spontaneous exile is more like it.

NIKOLAI: So, Lunin, I am surprised to find such a good friend of my brother before me. (Reading from a dossier) You spent two years in Paris, is that it? A disciple of the heretic St. Simon. The Simonians' chief voice in Russia....You see, Lunin, we know everything about you. Why don't you explain to me your philosophy.

LUNIN: It is quite simple, Your Majesty. We desire a new Christianity, one based entirely on ethics, not on misrepresentations of our Lord God. Catholicism without Christianity. Hereditary possession will cease; women will be emancipated.

NIKOLAI: I confess I find this somewhat opaque. And how is Utopia to be achieved by overthrowing, for instance, me?

LUNIN: I am not a revolutionary, Your Majesty, but a man of peace. A philosopher who was caught in the distasteful position of having to act.

COUNT: This man is lying in order to save himself. the revolutionary mentality is attracted to the Simonian movement. Lunin's friends number some of the most radical and incisive of the conspirators -

GALOIS: Chevalier, where are you?

NIKOLAI: Hush, Count. Lunin, you may be as much an eccentric as a revolutionary, yet your philosophy is virulent and heretical. On the other hand, you don't strike me as any more dangerous than some of the others - and Konstantin is quite fond of you. What to do? Decisions, always Decisions. Oh, how I hate being Emperor. Count, send him off to Siberia with the rest.

COUNT: Yes, Your Majesty.

(LUNIN is taken away by a guard. NIKOLAI, expecting COUNT to leave, goes back to his papers. But the COUNT does not leave.)

NIKOLAI: Well, what is it Benkendorf? Are we not through with interrogations, exiles and executions?

COUNT: There remains the matter of the poet.

NIKOLAI: The poet?

COUNT: Pushkin, Your Majesty. the December conspirators quote his poetry as moslems quote the Koran. Many claim to have been introduced to their

disgusting revolutionary ideas through his verse. We have intercepted some of the filth in the post. Of their authorship there can be no doubt.

NIKOLAI: You have the poems here?

COUNT: Yes, but I do not think Your Majesty would wish to see them.

NIKOLAI: Count, I am not longer a child.

(COUNT hands over a few pieces of paper)

NIKOLAI: (Reading)

O górye! O bezúmny son!

Gdyé vól'nost' i zakón? Nad námi

Yédiny vlástroyet topór.

Myi svérgnuli tzaryé. Ubitzú c paláchami

*Iz bráli myi v tzarí. O úzhas! O pozór!**

....

He sounds like a dangerous man.

COUNT: There is no question of it, Sire, but we have not been able to establish a definite connection with the conspirators. Pushkin is a slippery devil, if I may say so, Your Majesty. He is hard to pin down, even though he is a known friend of virtually all the conspirators.

NIKOLAI: So what do you expect me to do?

• О горе! О безумный сон!
Где вольность и закон? Над нами
Единый властвует топор.
Мы свергнули царей. Убицу с палачами
Избрали мы в цари. О ужас! О позор!

COUNT: Luck may be with us. As it turns out, Pushkin has petitioned for an audience with you, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: With me? What on earth for?

COUNT: He has been living in exile for the last five years, first in the South, more recently at his estate near Pskov. He complains of the need for medical treatment. Varicose veins, Your majesty. It is a perfect opportunity, if I may suggest as much, for you to question him about his role in the conspiracy.

NIKOLAI: A good idea. Have a feldjaeger fetch him.

COUNT: I have taken the liberty, Your Majesty -

NIKOLAI: (Slightly annoyed) Well then, show him in.

(Exit COUNT)

NIKOLAI: (Reading one of the poems)

Moi pérvy drug, moi drug bestzénny!

I ya sud'bu blagoslovíl,

Kogdá moi dvor uyedinyénny,

Pechál'nem snégom zanecénnny,

Tvoi kolokól'chik oglacíl.*

....

-
- Мой первый друг, мой друг бесценный!
И я судьбу благословил,
Когда мой двор уеденныйб
Печальным снегом занесенный,
Твой колокольчик огласил.

What sort of drivel is this? A revolutionary on the one hand, sentimentalist on the other. This Pushkin may turn out to be an interesting character.

(Enter COUNT with PUSHKIN, who is disheveled from his journey)

COUNT: Your Majesty, Aleksandr Sergeyeovich Pushkin.

PUSHKIN: (Bowling) At your service, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: You may leave us now, Count.

COUNT: Sire?

NIKOLAI: You may leave us now, Count.

(Hesitantly exit BENKENDORF)

NIKOLAI: (Walking totally around PUSHKIN, scrutinizing him from head to toe) So, the famous Pushkin. Not so tall as one would have expected by reputation. And how are you today, Pushkin?

PUSHKIN: (Pointedly) A bit chilly, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: Then by all means move closer to the fireplace.

(PUSHKIN hesitates)

It's quite all right, I assure you. Relax.

(PUSHKIN moves but does not relax)

You have been living in exile for some time now, haven't you?

PUSHKIN: Five years, Your Majesty. First in the Crimea, then at my father's estate in Mikhailovskoe.

NIKOLAI: Five years is a long time, isn't it, Pushkin?

PUSHKIN: Yes, Your Majesty. My best years are gone.

NIKOLAI: A pity. Perhaps we should make it ten.

PUSHKIN: (Icily) Perhaps we should, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: My late brother sent you south because of your subversive poetry. Why were you sent north again?

PUSHKIN: Count Vorontzov dismissed me from my post in Odessa, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: And why was that?

(No response)

Come come, Pushkin, you're among friends.

(Still no response)

I recently had a chat with an interesting fellow by the name of Lunin. Are you acquainted with him?

PUSHKIN: (Puzzled) Only slightly, Your Majesty. He is a St. Simonian.

NIKOLAI: Yes, an extremely interesting young man. I enjoyed him. Do you hold with his views?

PUSHKIN: Hardly, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: No? I am surprised. And why is that?

PUSHKIN: (A little nervously) He places too much faith in the common man.

NIKOLAI: And you do not?

PUSHKIN: No, Your Majesty, I do not.

NIKOLAI: Is that all?

PUSHKIN: We, ah, have differing religious views.

NIKOLAI: That is too bad. I admire him greatly, did you know?

PUSHKIN: (Very puzzled) No, I did not, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: He is devoutly religious. And you are -

(No response)

(Casually) I have exiled him to Siberia...Why did Vorontzov dismiss you?

PUSHKIN: To be honest, Your Majesty, I was having an affair with his wife. He found out, (aside) the old prune.

NIKOLAI: (Smiling) And why north?

PUSHKIN: I am not Lunin, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: You mentioned your views differed.

PUSHKIN: Yes. Your brother decided to move me closer to Petersburg in order to keep me under tighter surveillance. (Growing careless) You see, the police intercepted a letter in which I wrote I was taking lessons in pure atheism. I claimed to have found a man who refuted all the feeble arguments for the existence of a creator-

GALOIS: (Still writing, as if he has made a discovery) Very good!

NIKOLAI: Not another word! God have mercy on your soul!

PUSHKIN: (Quietly) I never bought one, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: What was that?

PUSHKIN: (Quickly) The letter was disreputable, Sire, enough to discredit anyone. The opinions were hastily thought out.

NIKOLAI: You will be more thoughtful from this time onward, your atheism disturbed me brother.

PUSHKIN: (Thoughtlessly) Your brother was a religious fanatic, Your -

NIKOLAI: (Freezing) Are you aware, Pushkin, that with a single word -

PUSHKIN: I am very much aware,(distinct pause) Your Majesty. (He moves from the fireplace)

NIKOLAI: No, please stay warm. Tell me, Pushkin, are you glad to be back?

PUSHKIN: Am I back, Your Majesty?

NIKOLAI: I am told that you have revolutionized Russian, that you have single handedly forged her into a modern literary language. Quite an accomplishment for one of your age.

PUSHKIN: Thank you, Your Majesty. It is a slight exaggeration.

NIKOLAI: No matter, I am not one for poetry anyway. In fact, I'm having great difficulty understanding one in particular. Oh, where did I put it?
(Rummages around on his desk) I thought you might explain to me its poetic subtleties.

PUSHKIN: (Eagerly) Gladly, Your Majesty. There is not a man alive to do it better.

NIKOLAI: Ah, here it is, "The Fourteenth of December."

PUSHKIN: The author, Sire?

NIKOLAI: Why you, Pushkin.

PUSHKIN: I have never written a poem by that name.

(NIKOLAI hands PUSHKIN a copy of the poem.)

PUSHKIN: (Reading a few lines, with trepidation)

O grief! O terrible dream!

Where is Liberty and Law? Over us rules but a single axe.

We overthrew kings. A murderer with executioners we brought to the throne. O horror! O infamy!

....

(Looking up meekly to the TZAR) Why, this is from my Andre Chenier. I wrote it last year. It concerns the French revolution and has nothing whatsoever to do with December. How could it? I wrote it almost a year earlier. It will be easy to verify.

NIKOLAI: (Skeptically) Is that so?

PUSHKIN: That is so.

NIKOLAI: (After a long pause) Were you on Senate Square, December 14th?

PUSHKIN: No, as you are well aware. Thank God I was locked away at my estate and was not informed of the conspiracy.

NIKOLAI: And if you had been informed?

PUSHKIN: I assure you, you would have arrested me with the rebels.

NIKOLAI: And, I assure you, you would now be with your friends in Siberia I see you have written to one Ivan Ivanovich Puschin -

PUSHKIN: Jeaneau!

NIKOLAI: "My first friend -

PUSHKIN: - my priceless friend!

And how I thanked fate,

When in my solitary courtyard

Blanketed by the sad snows
Your sleighbells resounded.
I pray to God
That my voice will now give
you the same consolation -

NIKOLAI: Such sentiments for a traitor.

PUSHKIN: He was as a brother to me, no less. I wrote to him as a brother, Your Majesty, not as a conspirator. He visited me once during my exile. His sleighbells...What harm in comforting him now? Oh Jeaneau! Do you know what a friend is? (Catching himself) Forgive me, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: Emperors do not have friends, Pushkin. Tell me, what do you think of me?

(No response)

You are strangely silent for a poet.

(No response)

You hate me because I have crushed the party to which you belong. But believe me, I also love Russia. I am no enemy to the people. I desire their freedom, but first they must be strengthened.

PUSHKIN: Only tyrants believe that people are strengthened by yokes of iron...I hope you are not such a tyrant.

NIKOLAI: You are a very brave man, Pushkin, or else a very foolhardy one like you. Will you give me your word of honor that you will write no more subversive literature?

(No response)

The revolution is over, Pushkin. You have lost. I am still Emperor, as God wills. It is time for you to settle down, buy a new suit of clothes...You must not make much money as a poet.

PUSHKIN: No, Your Majesty. The mob would buy a poem for the weight of the paper, not the weight of the words. They put more value in an earthen jug than in a thought. Hmph. May they boil in their jugs!

NIKOLAI: Strange sentiments for a hero of the people. Your word of honor?

PUSHKIN: Your Majesty, the censorship is so severe, I have written nothing at all recently.

NIKOLAI: Then I will be your personal censor. You will send me every word from your brilliant pen, via Benkendorf of course. Your word of honor?

(After a long hesitation, PUSHKIN takes a piece of paper from his pocket, examines it, and throws it into the fireplace)

And what was that?

PUSHKIN: A subversive poem, Your Majesty. I had planned to give it to you myself, should you have decided to pack me off down the Vladimir road or throw me into the dungeon at Peter and Paul.

NIKOLAI: (After a pause breaks into laughter) Good, very good. But the dungeon at Peter and Paul? Such a dismal place for a poet. No, I think not. It is time for you to settle down. Stop looking for ways of getting into trouble. The

revolution is over; you missed it. Forget causes which aren't your own. Get married, have a family. It will be safer for you.

PUSHKIN: Yes, Your Majesty, I agree. The road is clear.

NIKOLAI: Good, good. And what is the next masterpiece we can expect from your inexhaustible muse?

PUSHKIN: I think *Boris Godunov*, Your Majesty.

NIKOLAI: Excellent, suitably weighty. (He puts his arm around PUSHKIN and walks toward the audience. The stage is set for Scene II.) Gentlemen! I want you to meet the new Pushkin. Forget the old Pushkin; this is *my* Pushkin.

(Immediate fade in to next scene where GALOIS is still writing)

ACT TWO

Scene Two

A large, communal cell in Sainte-Pélagie prison. It is very gloomy. The walls might be white with black lines between the bricks to heighten the surrealistic effect. There are a number of prisoners, including RASPAIL and GALOIS. PUSHKIN also takes the part of a prisoner. As the scene begins, we hear a snatch of music from Bartok's BLUEBEARD's CASTLE, seventh door, while GALOIS continues his writing from the last scene. As the music fades, GALOIS puts down his pen and arranges his papers. Then he stands and addresses the sleeping prisoners.

GALOIS: (With pride) Two Memoires on Pure Analysis, by Evariste Galois.

PRISONER: (Rolling over) Eh, what is it now, Galois? Go to sleep.

(PRISONER goes back to sleep)

GALOIS: Surely, you buried here with me must understand.

(A loud snore)

GALOIS: (Bitterly) Yes, I see. I see clearly. You scoundrels are as bad as the rest. The work is not finished quite yet. (He begins to pace) Preface -

(Another loud snore)

GALOIS: Yes, a preface...(At first slowly, then with increasing speed)

Firstly, you will notice that the second page of this work is not encumbered by surnames, Christian names, or titles. Absent are eulogies to some prince whose purse would have opened at the smoke of incense, threatening to close once the incense holder was empty. Neither will you see, in characters three times as high as those in the text, homage respectfully paid to some high-ranking official in science, or to some wise patron. I tell no one that I owe anything of value in my work to his advice or encouragement. I do not say so because it would be a lie. If I addressed anything to the important men of science or the world – and at times, I grant, the distinction between the two is imperceptible – I swear it would not be thanks. I owe to important men the fact that the first of these papers is appearing so late. I owe to other important men the fact that the whole thing was written in prison, a place, you will agree, hardly suited for meditation. Here, I have been dumbfounded at my own listlessness in keeping my mouth shut at my stupid critics. Don't misunderstand: the why's and wherefore's of my stay in prison have nothing to do with the subject at hand. But I must tell you how manuscripts go astray in the portfolios of the members of the Institute. This occurs with astonishing frequency, though, in truth, I cannot understand such carelessness from those who already have on their consciences the death of Abel. As I do not want to compare myself with that celebrated mathematician, it will suffice to say that my paper on the theory of equations has sat in the Academy almost two years and, in an earlier version, almost three. As you might guess, there are even stranger incidents in this genre of anecdotes. But I would be ungracious to recount them because, other than

the loss of my manuscripts, a similar accident has never occurred to me. No, it was only my poor appearance that saved me from the jaws of wolves. I have already said more than is necessary to comprehend why, in spite of my stock of good will, it is absolutely impossible -as much as I might like - to adorn or disfigure my worth with a dedication.

Secondly, you must realize that the first paper is not virgin to the eyes of a master. An extract sent almost a year ago to the Academy of Sciences was submitted to the inspection of M. Poisson, who said that he understood nothing of it. To my eyes, blinded by self-love, it simply proves that M. Poisson either would not, or could not, understand my work. But it will necessarily prove in the eyes of the public that my book is meaningless. Therefore, you will agree that I have every reason to believe the scientific world will greet my work, which I am submitting to the public, with a smile of compassion. The most indulgent will accuse me of a blunder. For some time, I will be compared with those indefatigable souls who, each year, find a method to square the circle anew. I will especially have to bear the wild laughter of the examiners of the Polytechnique. (In passing, I am surprised that they do not all occupy chairs in the Academy, since their place is certainly not in posterity.) These men, who monopolize the printing of mathematics textbooks, will not be able to comprehend that a young man, twice failed by them, has the pretension to write, not a textbook, but an original treatise.

All the preceding I have told you to prove that it is knowingly I expose myself to the laughter of fools. If, in spite of everything, I publish the fruits of my

labors with such a slight chance of being understood, it is only because...it is only because I hope that someday my research will fall into the hands of persons whom a stupid arrogance will not deter from reading it, and may direct them along the new path which analysis must take... Perhaps, even more so, it is because I wish the friends whom I found in this world, before I was buried under the bolt, to know I am still alive...

(RASPAIL, PUSHKIN, and the other prisoners, who have been awakened during the course of the preceding, are momentarily awe-struck. Then RASPAIL leads them in applause.)

RASPAIL: Our little scientist has engraved more upon his puny brow in three years of study than the most learned savants have accumulated in sixty. In three years more, he will be the great scholar. (With some sarcasm) A sure mark of the living. In the name of science and virtue, I say he is alive!

PRISONERS: Bravo!

Let him be alive!

The great scholar!

Here here!

RASPAIL: (To GALOIS) There, we have certified you are alive.

GALOIS: (At the bars) What a stinking hole we are in.

RASPAIL: Galois, I fully sympathize with your feelings but, surely, you must find our predicament delightfully ironic.

GALOIS: I find it unclean...and the smell is horrible.

(Enter PRISON ATTENDANT)

ATTENDANT: Watch ou' there. Wash up time.

(Throws bucket of water on the floor and turns to exit. RASPAIL grabs him.)

RASPAIL: I want a sample of our drinking water. I want some of the flour you use in baking what you would have us believe is bread. Do you understand? And I want a microscope. I'll pay. Here. Scum! Get it!

(Exit ATTENDANT. Now RASPAIL addresses GALOIS) Poor child, either you learn to look a worldly dilemmas with a crooked eye or you become the dupe of evil. Is there a single doubt that this is the only way to remain in spirit? You will never last out six or eight months if you don't learn to live on irony.

GALOIS: I am certain one can live on the soles of boots if one has a mind to.

RASPAIL: well, to my mind, the situation is not a little ironic. Here you are, arrested for you menacing toast, "To Louis-Philippe -

(The other PRISONERS stage a mock arrest and take GALOIS into custody.

They quickly arrange a makeshift court and stand GALOIS before the bench.

During this, RASPAIL may continue:)

- Ah, dread misfortune. But lo! Triumph! Victory!

PRISONER 1 (As JUDGE): M. Galois, you have been accused of threatening the King's life.

PRISONER 2 (As PROSECUTION): Yes, Your Honor. He shouted a toast at Republican banquet, "To Louis-Philippe-" The dagger he held made clear the intent. Here is the weapon, Your Honor.

PUSHKIN (As DEFENSE): Your Honor, I beg to differ. the toast actually read, "To Louis-Philippe, if he betrays." The qualifying clause, as you might imagine, was drowned out in the ensuing maelstrom.

GALOIS: (Aside to PUSHKIN) That's a lie.

PUSHKIN: A minor manipulation to save your neck.

GALOIS: That's easy for you to say. You've already sold out. I still believe truth is not disposable.

PUSHKIN: I've merely taken poetic license.

JUDGE: Jurors?

CHORUS OF PRISONERS: Not guilty!

PUSHKIN: (To GALOIS) You see, the pen is mightier than the truth.

RASPAIL: But not two months later

JUDGE: M. Galois, you have been accused of engaging in Republican manifestations.

PROSECUTION: Your Honor, he was apprehended on July 14 wearing the uniform of the illegal Artillery Guard.

GALOIS: This is true.

PUSHKIN: But -

(GALOIS cuts him off)

PROS: He was also carrying several loaded pistols, a musket, and a dagger.

GALOIS: This is true.

PUSHKIN: But -

JUDGE: Jurors?

CHORUS: Guilty!

GALOIS: (To PUSHKIN) The truth is the truth.

RASPAIL: A candid soul to the end. So you are satisfied with your divine retribution?

GALOIS: It doesn't matter.

RASPAIL: No?

GALOIS: No. In spite of everything to the contrary, they would have arrested me on any excuse – however flimsy you care to imagine: giving speeches, distributing leaflets, carrying a pistol –or a dagger. You must grant the police have been watching me.

RASPAIL: That is absolutely true. You are the fiercest Republican. All Paris knows that...I assure you the police keep a constant watch over your little head. I also assure you that some of your accomplices feared your presence as much as they feared the police itself. They felt more at ease, I am sure, when they learned you had been bolted away. And what is not to be feared nowadays, in one way or another, from a virtuous man who plans all his actions with mathematical precision?

GALOIS: Then you concede the argument, concede that I would sooner or later have been arrested on any charge, that the police want me under lock and key any way they can get me?

RASPAIL: I concede half the argument.

GALOIS: What do you mean?

RASPAIL: Yes, they want you very much. But you, my little comrade, want them even more. And, like a moth to the flame, you will find them. You would have discovered a charge to be arrested on even if the imbecilic police, as lacking in imagination as they are, could not invent one for you. Yes, your path is straight and narrow to this dung heap of a prison, Sainte-Pélagie.

GALOIS: That is easy for you to say, M. Famous Republican. What do you know? You have not been pursued by that unrelenting trinity of Bourbons, Jesuits and Academicians. It is easy for you to say "my fault" because you do not see the intelligence acting behind these events.

RASPAIL: My little Galois, I heard your speech to the sleeping world. Do you think you are the only one with a holy axe to grind against the Academy?

GALOIS: What are you talking about?

RASPAIL: Let me tell you, friend. Once, seven years ago, I took my courage in hand and went to see the great physiologist Bichat. I wished to ask his help in preparing a paper to be read at the Academy-

RASPAIL: You, at the Academy?

RASPAIL: Yes, me at the Academy. And do you know what Bichat said when I advocated the use of the microscope to examine cell structure? "When one looks in the dark, everyone sees what he can and wishes."

GALOIS: (Half disbelieving) You are a scientist.

RASPAIL: An eminent one I might add.

GALOIS: Then you should understand my predicament! Why do you not sympathize?

RASPAIL: Oh, I do. But you see, I have lived to be almost forty years, and I plan to live another forty, if God grants. I received my education at a Jesuit seminary. I know your Jesuits. I risked supporting the Emperor after the Bourbons returned to power. I know your Bourbons. I have had my scientific work plagiarized, and I have fought mightily and often without a taste of victory. But I tell you there is too much stupidity in those people for there to be an intelligence working against us. Your work is done, whether the Academy recognizes it or not. You have discovered something fundamental about the laws of the universe? Bravo, my tiny scholar. Detach yourself from the laws of men and you will remain in good health.

GALOIS: I think I like you, Raspail, but I also think you are a hypocrite for ladling out advice which you have obviously not heeded yourself.

RASPAIL: I am likely the greatest hypocrite alive, but I give you good advice nonetheless.

(A WOMAN VISITOR is led in by the GUARD. Her dress is very long)

GUARD: I'll give you a minute. It's not visiting hours, you hear?

(Exit GUARD. WOMAN takes a bottle of liquor out of her boot and hands it to a PRISONER, whom she embraces.)

WOMAN: For the canteen.

(PRISONER kisses her. After a brief exchange she exits.)

RASPAIL: A restaurant or a cafe could not be better. Even the guards are envious. Let us stop being morbid and pay due homage to Bacchus, eh?

PUSHKIN: Perhaps an ode?

RASPAIL: Not necessary.

PRISONER: (To GALOIS) Hey, old man, stop moping and join us. I've never seen you take a drink. Haven't you the strength for it?

GALOIS: So, you think I am not one of you?

(He grabs the bottle and pours it down his gullet in one draught)

RASPAIL: What is it?

PRISONER: Brandy.

RASPAIL: For the mercy of God.

(GALOIS finishes the bottle, staggers, and collapses. RASPAIL drags him to a cot)

GALOIS: How I like you, at this moment more than ever.

RASPAIL: Calm down, Galois. Go to sleep.

GALOIS: How come you don't get drunk? You are so serious, a friend of the poor. But me? What is happening to me? I can't control myself. I feel as though...as though I am carrying two men inside me. One is patient, rational...the other fiery-

RASPAIL: Please do not talk now. You do not know what you are saying. Go to sleep.

GALOIS: You see, I do not like liquor. At the word of a fool, I drink it, holding my nose, and get drunk. I do not like women either. Do you know, I'll probably

die in a duel over some despicable coquette. She will ask me to rise to the defense of her honor, her compromised honor.

RASPAIL: Pure soul, if you only knew how comical you appear to the world –

GALOIS: Please do not laugh at me, please.

RASPAIL: – and how touching to my heart.

GALOIS: (Suddenly violent) You, my friend, despise me! And you are right to despise me. But I, I am the culprit. I must kill myself!

(He takes a dagger out of his shirt and tries to stab himself. RASPAIL, after a brief struggle removes it from GALOIS' hands)

Do not laugh at me. Please do not laugh.

RASPAIL: Shh.

GALOIS: (Falling asleep) Oh Father. My father

(Time passes. We hear the Bartok again. As at the beginning of the scene,

GALOIS is writing. He reads what he has just finished.)

GALOIS: One can imagine that while working on such a new subject, along such unusual lines, I have often encountered difficulties which I could not overcome. Thus in these two papers, the reader will often find the remark, "I don't know." The class of readers I spoke of at first will not fail to find a laugh. This is unfortunate, for there is no doubt that the most precious and scholarly books are those in which the author states most clearly what he does not know, because an author never harms a reader as much as when he conceals a difficulty. When competition – that is, selfishness – no longer

rules in science, when people associate with one another for study and not in order to send sealed packages to the Academies, they will be eager to publish even the smallest results, while adding, "I do not know the rest."

GUARD: A visitor for Prisoner Galois!

(Enter CHEVALIER)

CHEVALIER: Evariste!

GALOIS: (Rising) Auguste! You do not know how your visit brightens this cell. It is not a bad tomb where one can receive signs of the living.

CHEVALIER: Here, I've brought you some food. Fresh bread and cakes. Are you all right, Evariste? We worry about you so much, more than you can know. Your aunt is sick with distress. Have you been able to get any work done?

GALOIS: Yes, yes, I can work anywhere. It is all done up here. (He points to his head) I forget nothing. I've just finished a new paper. After two years, I think I fully understand algebraic equations. I have recently begun meditations on the theory of elliptic functions. I believe I have made some progress.

CHEVALIER: Excellent! My dear friend, when you have completed your papers, let me have the honor of taking them to the publishers. We shall get them printed yet. Remain in hope; do not despair. We need you.

GALOIS: Me?

CHEVALIER: You are one of our wise men, a savant –

GALOIS: An idiot savant.

CHEVALIER: It is men like you who see more clearly than others. Men such as you must guide the world out of this labyrinth in which it is lost.

GALOIS: My faithful Auguste, you fill me with tears. Let me hear you speak; I detest talking about myself.

CHEVALIER: There is trouble among the Simonians, Evariste.

GALOIS: Really? I thought you were one happy family, at peace with yourself and the brotherhood of man.

CHEVALIER: No. (Expansively) There have been horrible, violent debates between Father Enfantin and Father Bazard. Enfantin hinted that he would abolish the very institution of marriage, enfranchise all women, make them equal in the temple, and allow them to leave their husbands. Bazard objects but Enfantin is a man of action. He will go out and recruit the proletariat into our community. He will reform the government, you'll see. I know you will.

GALOIS: Your hopes are fantastical, Auguste.

CHEVALIER: That may be, Evariste. But you wish to overthrow only a king, while we wish to overturn a world.

GALOIS: Very good. Then to the success of your revolution, and to mine -whatever that may be.

CHEVALIER: Thank you, Evariste. Evariste, will you come to live with the family when you are released? It would be good for you, I am sure.

GALOIS: No, I cannot accept. Your vision is so foreign to my own, I cannot conceive of it, and I do not think there is a savant in this stinking world who can see a

clear path to either goal. Besides, I shall never get out of this vile, obscene pit.

CHEVALIER: Yes you will, Evariste, and very soon.

GALOIS: You seem very sure of yourself. How do you know?

CHEVALIER: Have you not been told? The cholera is coming to Paris. All the prisoners are being removed to nursing homes to avoid the epidemic.

GALOIS: (Laughing hysterically) Eight months in Sainte-Pélagie, couped up like a rat with thieves and murderers - not the most savory crew you will grant - and they want to save us from cholera. Auguste, you must be mad.

CHEVALIER: No, it is true.

GALOIS: Friends, have you heard? We're to be removed. They want to save us from cholera!

RASPAIL: An irony, Galois.

GALOIS: (Laughing) A plague, Raspail!

RASPAIL: Remember the camphor!

PRISONERS: Hoorah for the disease!

Hoorah for cholera!

Bravo! Bravo!

Cholera! Cholera! etc.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Scene One

The first part of this scene, a ball, is staged fairly closely to the music of Tchaikovsky's waltz from Evgeny Onegin, based on the Pushkin poem of the same name. I used Karajan's Berlin Philharmonic recording (DG 25 30200) to time the dialogue and action. The numbers on the left hand side of the page are bar numbers from the score which indicate where each bit of action is to occur. Bars which, in the score, are repeated are numbered twice with different numbers. Approximate timings are also given for convenience, though these will vary with tape recorder, temperature, and position of the moon.

Bars 1-40: Introduction to waltz.

41 (31 seconds):

The curtain rises to reveal a ball. The impression should be given of many guests, some dancing, some chatting. PUSHKIN, GALOIS and a FRIEND sit downstage, not participating in the dance. One young girl who is waltzing stands out. She is NATALYA, PUSHKIN's fiancée. She might detach herself from the crowd at bar 63.

43 (Principal theme, 33 secs):

GALOIS (Following music): So, poet, a hero's life is not for you. A revolution you've abandoned, a marriage you've contracted.

(38 secs): PUSHKIN: A marriage I've contracted, a life I've abandoned. Women all to be thrown over. Drink up, this is our last. My song will be a dirge. Ahhh, but let it be.

(49 secs) FRIEND: You treat yourself as your own characters, at some distance. "*Metel'*" (МЕТЕЛЬ) I recall: "Maria Gavrilovna was raised on French novels and consequently was in love." Little sympathy.

75-77: PUSHKIN: My characters don't always deserve it.

(1:02)

79 (1:04): FRIEND: (Watching the dance) Your fiancée is the foremost beauty in St. Petersburg. Pray, Pushkin, how did you manage it?

PUSHKIN: Beauty is not in vogue this year. Her mother, the dear, got worried about pawning her off.

GALOIS: Call her over, would you?

(PUSHKIN waves and NATALYA waltzes over. There should be ample time for this.)

GALOIS: Charming.

FRIEND: Magnificent. Have her say something.

PUSHKIN: Natalya, my angel, say something.

NATALYA: (Curtseying) Good-evening. May I go back to the waltz now?

(PUSHKIN nods to her, turns to his friends, and shrugs.)

110 (1:32): (NATALYA reenters the ball and begins to dance with a young man.)

GALOIS: Beauty isn't in vogue you say? I'd be careful.

PUSHKIN: I assure you, there's nothing to it.

FRIEND: (To GALOIS) Nothing to it is right. They say her intelligence -- like her beauty -- is only skin deep.

(This should be timed to end just as the fanfare begins.)

127-130 (Brass Fanfare, 1:46): (An almost complete lull in all activities.)

131-134: PAGE: His Royal Majesty, the Emperor of All Russia!

135-138 (Fanfare: Enter Tzar NIKOLAI I.)

139-142: (pantomime introductions, tittering, etc.)

143-146: (Fanfare: Another lull in the action.)

147-150: PAGE: Madame Natalya Ivanovna Goncharova!

151-153: (Fanfare: Enter MME. GONCHAROVA and begins to approach PUSHKIN.)

155-158: PUSHKIN: The devil! My mother-in-law!

159 (Flute): MME. GONCHAROVA: Pouchkin! The dresses Pouchkin!

PUSHKIN: Yes, the dresses. I shall write some lyrics.

MME. G.: And the shoes, you worthless man.

PUSHKIN: Yes, the shoes. I shall write some idylls.

171-172 (2:22-2:24) :

MME. G (In rhythm): Lace and perfume and feathers.

173-174(2:24):

PUSHKIN (In rhythm): Odes and hymns and elegies.

MME. G: Don't forget, you're joining my family, Pushkin.

PUSHKIN: I'm marrying your daughter, not "Your Highness."

MME. G.: Eleven thousand rubles, we need them.

PUSHKIN: *Bozhe!* (Боже!) I'm marrying a trousseau!

MME. G: You don't love us, do you?

187 (Brass. In Rhythm)

---x---x---x---x---x---x-----x-----x---x---x---

PUSHKIN: Gos--po--di Pom--il--uyi! Save me from this!

(MME.; GONCHAROVA crosses upstage) 190(Strings)

PUSHKIN: (Dreamily) Ah, for the old days: Charon le Rose, an amorous widow. But she wasn't the first, you know. Natasha, a maid in waiting to Volonskaya, old flirt. Madame Karamzina, I had hoped as well, but she was 35. and I just sixteen. She laughed.

FRIEND: There was Golitzina? The princess?

PUSHKIN: Yes, I remember. A zoo cashier also, at about the same time. The Raevsky girls, Helen, Marie, and Cath'rine.

GALOIS: All three?

PUSHKIN: They kept me occupied, with a few friends.

FRIEND: The Duchess next, wasn't that it?

PUSHKIN: But a passing smile and a hasty kiss.

FRIEND: Kishinyov, that seedy town in the south. You must tell all. Keep going.

227 (3 10) PUSHKIN: To every dame there a husband. To the husband please add a lover. And yet, still a third -- she must never be bored, oh no... The major's wife, Solovkina, I recall. The official's wife, Eyfeldt it was. No time for jealousy you know.

243 (3:24) ; (The TZAR has joined NATALYA in the waltz)

243: GALOIS: Ah, the Tzar is dancing with your fiancée. A man with the eye for the desmoiselles, no?

PUSHKIN: Let him dance! Better his feet than mine, I assure you.

GALOIS: A hint of unpleasantness in that?

PUSHKIN: None, absolutely. At 33, he's a Tzar and well aware of it. At 18 she's a coquette and equally well aware of it. Allow her her age.

GALOIS: Perhaps you should turn her over to me. Are you aware of what you're getting into?

PUSHKIN: (Laughing) I do not think marriage will be the last stupidity I commit in my life.

271-273: GALOIS: And your past stupidities -- you were saying?

274 (strings, 3: 52):

PUSHKIN: (Dreamily again) There was Marie Shrieber, a spritely seventeen. Madame Vakar, dumpy, witty, and mad. Sandulaki, exotic Sandulaki. She was dark, but merry as well. At that time there was Solovkina -

GALOIS: Her you've mentioned.

PUSHKIN: Please forgive; there were so many. The Jewess, the gypsy, the tatar.

Pulkeria: *"Ah, quel vous etes, M. Pouchkine! Qu'est-ce que vous badinez!"*

Riznich and Calypso and Inglezi. And Elizaveta Vorontzova -

FRIEND: The Vorontzova!

PUSHKIN: Shh! Be discreet, I beg.

306: And I cannot forget Euphrasia and Netty. And of course Anna Petrovna Kern.

FRIEND: K? Is it truly K? "I remember that marvelous moment, when I first beheld you..."

PUSHKIN: "I praise her readiness, good neighbor..."

FRIEND: Please, Pushkin, not in public!

322 (4 34): PUSHKIN: But I should hurry; it is easy to become a bore.

Anna Ossipova and Madame Khitrova

Sophia Urussova and Catherine Ushakova

Olga Kalishnikova and Alexandra Rimskaya-Korsakova and -

(FRIEND is frantically signaling to PUSHKIN that his mother-in law is walking up behind him.)

338-352 (4 46):

PUSHKIN (In rhythm):

If you wish to be polite - admire.

If you wish to rise - stoop low.

If you wish to be in heaven - pray.

If you wish to be in hell – get married.

352-367 (crescendo, 5: 04)

(PUSHKIN slowly turns in horror to see his future mother-in-law glowering over his shoulder)

368 (5 :18) -end of waltz

(Pantomime argument between PUSHKIN and MME.GONCHAROVA as the BALL continues. PUSHKIN runs off stage during the final bars for a quick change before returning for the next part of the scene)

(Total time 6:18.)

As the waltz ends, PUSHKIN runs off the stage. NATALYA should also waltz off. The guests immediately assemble themselves for a wedding. This should be done to Russian Orthodox Church Music with bells. The set may be simple, consisting of only a lectern, a large pectoral cross, and a Bible. On the other hand, if it can be assembled quickly, the set might be modeled after the interior of a Russian Orthodox Church.

The parts below may all be done to the music and thus no dialogue is required.

Alternately, the music may end as the bride reaches the altar. then the priest may intone a short prayer.

1. PUSHKIN awaits bride at altar.
2. NATALYA enters to whispers from the guests.
3. PUSHKIN and NATALYA stand at the altar before the PRIEST. They each hold a candle. Two altar boys hold golden crowns above their heads.

4. (Prayer)
5. Rings are exchanged (three times) between PUSHKIN and NATALYA. This may be done by the PRIEST. On the third exchange, a ring falls. PUSHKIN bends to retrieve it. His candle goes out. As he stands up, he knocks over a the cross, which in turn knocks over the lectern holding the Holy Scriptures.
5. (Alternate) The rings are exchanged uneventfully. The PRIEST then leads PUSHKIN and NATALYA, followed by the crown holders, around the lectern, three times. On the third time, PUSHKIN accidentally knocks over the Scriptures or a cross.
6. PUSHKIN recovers.

PUSHKIN: These are all evil omens.

As the wedding ends, the guests immediately assume positions for a second ball, played in the same set as the previous ball. This entire section is done to the music of Carl Nielsen's Third Symphony (Espansiva), bars 279-452 of the first movement. (The best recording I know of is Herbert Blomstedt and the San Francisco Symphony.) No dialogue is used in this section other than the announcements of the PAGE, as indicated. Part of the effectiveness of this scene will depend on a suitable volume of the music.

Bar 279 (Trumpets):

PUSHKIN and NATALYA begin to dance, clumsily, uncomfortably.

Perhaps PUSHKIN is tripping or stepping on her toes.

327 (45 secs):

PAGE: His Majesty, the Emperor of All Russia!

Enter NIKOLAI

327-330:

PUSHKIN hands over NATALYA to the TZAR. This must be done very quickly (in 3-1/2 bars). If there is not enough time, the PAGE's announcement will have to be made a few seconds early.

330 (51 secs, second section of music):

TZAR begins dancing with NATALYA on the last beat of bar 330, that is, on the pick-up to bar 331. His dancing should be very graceful. At this point, PUSHKIN moves downstage to a corner, hopefully near a pillar, and slowly begins to boil into a rage. GALOIS may be present to help calm him down. In any case, this must be a Jekyll-Hyde transformation.

371 (1:27):

PAGE: The Horseguardsman, Baron George D'Anthès!

(The exact placement of this announcement is not crucial, but should be no sooner than bar 369 and no later than the trombone entrance on bar 375.)

372:

Enter D'ANTHES.

372-378:

An elaborate exchange of NATALYA from TZAR to D'ANTHES.

NATALYA is obviously pleased. Just as the music is rapidly growing wilder, so should PUSHKIN, upon seeing D'ANTHES, rapidly grow furious.

387(last beat) (1:38)

D'ANTHES begins dancing with NATALYA. Long, sweeping motions.

Wonderful dancing that covers the entire stage. PUSHKIN has grown hysterical. He sneaks around pillars, spies on his wife, pulls his hair.

As the music settles down, the guests disperse, leaving PUSHKIN alone and exhausted on stage. The music makes a total fade by the first beat of bar 452.

(Total time 2:45)

Lights Fade. The next scene is set. Spot on GALOIS.

GALOIS: (Kneeling by PUSHKIN) Your course has been diverted, poet, voice of gods and revolution. Now you are ensnared by a woman. I tell you, flee Petersburg and find yourself again. There is still time.

PUSHKIN: You talk of courses. There never was any course.

GALOIS: (He points and enters next scene) There is, that way. Go.

ACT THREE

Scene Two

A garden at a nursing home. Long, crooked shadows. A hint of the surreal. A girl, perhaps a little older than GALOIS is sitting alone, sadly. Enter GALOIS.

GALOIS: Stephanie, what is wrong?

STEPHANIE: Nothing, Galois, nothing.

GALOIS: Are you certain?

STEPHANIE: It will pass...Please, amuse me with some news or gossip while I pour some tea.

GALOIS: (Aside) Gossip -- rumors, whispers, lies, shadows. How I detest it. (To STEPHANIE) Do you know, Stephanie, since our transfer to this nursing home, I have continued my meditations on elliptic functions. Would you like to hear about them?

STEPHANIE: Really, Galois, I have no interest in your mathematics. Your equations are as lifeless to me as a ...wilted flower.

GALOIS: If you only knew how my mind seethes with pictures spinning this way and advancing that. They have a life all their own. I can hardly control them. Equations have so little to do with mathematics.

STEPHANIE: Still, it is not for me...Have some tea.

GALOIS: Thank you. Gossip...Very well. Can you believe it, Stephanie, my poor friend Chevalier, plans to follow the Simonians to Menilmontant. Only forty of them are left...

STEPHANIE: Forty? And a year ago they were such the rage.

GALOIS: (Picking a flower) Yes, but you see, the fantasy has disintegrated.

STEPHANIE: (Distractedly) And the Republic, Galois?

GALOIS: (Crushing the flower) Disintegrated. (After a pause) What was that?

STEPHANIE: I heard nothing.

GALOIS: (Peering around a wall) I must be on my guard. The vipers wait to strike.

STEPHANIE: (Sneaking up behind him) Boo!

(GALOIS jumps. STEPHANIE begins to laugh)

Galois, I think if the police wanted so badly to be rid of you, they would choose less obvious methods.

GALOIS: Methods? What do you mean?

STEPHANIE: (Shaking her head) Nothing. Drink your tea.

(They sit in silence. She dabs her eyes with a handkerchief)

GALOIS: Again tears. What has happened?

STEPHANIE: (Rising) I should help Father with the patients.

GALOIS: Stephanie!

STEPHANIE: You insist on knowing. Very well. I quarreled with a friend. That's all. He was angered that I have spent time with you.

GALOIS: He? He insulted you?

STEPHANIE: Well, yes, but...it will pass...a trifle.

GALOIS: I cannot allow your honor to be tarnished.

STEPHANIE: Galois, it is not important. It was a stupid quarrel.

GALOIS: Still, there is my position.

STEPHANIE: Your position, what are you saying?

GALOIS: Are you seeing another man?

STEPHANIE: Galois, I do not reflect so deeply on whom I see and whom I do not. Are you concerned with my honor or your own?

GALOIS: How can I permit the woman I love to be insulted?

STEPHANIE: Love? Galois, this is comical. Such sentiments do not exist between us and have never existed between us. Why do you speak of such things?

GALOIS: Because I love you. And I regard cholera as my greatest friend because it brought me here to you. Who dares make you unhappy?

STEPHANIE: The both of you! I have given neither any sign of encouragement and yet you each take such unbridled liberties- you presume to tell me with whom I may associate and with whom I may not. I will have nothing of it.

GALOIS: No sign of encouragement. Such a lie. For a month you have allowed me court -

STEPHANIE: Court! I have allowed you the pleasure of my company.

GALOIS: -And now you spit on my love as you would on a worm.

STEPHANIE: You should be grateful for the affection I granted you.

GALOIS: So you admit you have been leading me on.

STEPHANIE: I admit nothing and nothing will change.

GALOIS: Yes, I was a fool for believing there is any compassion in this world. Out of my sight, you treacherous spider. You make me despise myself, *putain*. If I ever set eyes on you again, my dagger will find its way quickly to your heart, but it will not be from the back.

STEPHANIE: (Running out) You will be sorry you ever set eyes on me soon enough, Evariste Galois!

GALOIS: (Collapsing into a chair) Disintegrated...

(After a long pause, enter PUSHKIN)

PUSHKIN: No, that was not right.

GALOIS: What are you doing here? I thought I told you to flee the country.

PUSHKIN: Domestic duties, I'm afraid. But as I was saying, you cannot treat a woman like an equation.

GALOIS: Yes, you've had more experience than I in that arena.

PUSHKIN: Indisputably. Allow me to demonstrate.

(He kneels and takes GALOIS' hand)

Stephanie, I beg of you, forgive my inadequacies, as numerous as they may be. I shall be your slave for life, I will bring honor to your name, I will care for you when sick -

GALOIS: Galois, you are such a bore.

PUSHKIN: Yes, you are right. I am unworthy of your love. Find another. The revolution demands all my attention. No more will I bask in sunlit gardens and the sweet smell of your perfume. I shall remember you in my verses.

(He rises. The set has been transformed into his study for the next scene.)

ACT THREE

Scene Three

PUSHKIN's study. His actual study was lined with thousands of books, contained a couch, and a rather large writing table with a famous inkwell in the form of an Ethiopian Negro. These details are not essential.

Now PUSHKIN begins to pace the room, composing a verse in his head.

PUSHKIN: Nyet, ya ne dorozhú metyézhnim naslazhdyényem,
Vostórgom chúvstvennim, bezúmstvom, isstuplényem,
Stenámen, krikami vakhánki molodói,
Kogdá víyas' v moix obyátyax zmiyéy,
Porívom pílkix lask i yazvóyu lobzánnny,
Ona torópit mig poclédnix codrogány!*

Yes, I think that is good.

(Now somewhat wryly)

No, I do not prize the stormy delight,

-
- Нет, я не дорожу мятежным наслаждением,
Восторгом чувствунным безумством исступлением,
Стенамьен, криками ваханки молодой,
Когда, виясь в моих объятиях змией,
Порывом пылких ласк и язвою лобзаний,
Она торопит миг последних содроганий!

The sensuous rapture, the madness, the frenzy, The moans and shouts of a
brazen young woman,

When as a serpent writhing in my embrace,

With a surge of ardent caresses and stinging kisses,

She hastens the instant of final convulsions.

(Enter NATALYA, dressed for a ball. She spins for her husband. Now PUSHKIN
recites to her.)

Oh, how sweeter my humble one!

Oh, how painfully happy with you I am,

When, bowing to my long entreaties,

You surrender to me tenderly, without passion,

Bashful, cold to my ardor, hardly responding,

And then animating always more, more –

And finally sharing my flame against your will!

NATALYA: Don't I look wonderful, Pushkin?

PUSHKIN: As always. Did you like my verse?

NATALYA: Oh, Pushkin, you know how your poetry bores me. Do people really listen
to it?

PUSHKIN: Tell me, my angel, what doesn't bore you? No, there is no need. Parties and
dances and all the good things in life. Yes, I know.

NATALYA: But what a week this has been! Sunday we danced till five in the morning at
the Obolensky's; Monday until three at the Golitzin's; on Thursday we are

going to a fancy dress ball at Mme. Riabina's; Saturday we will be at another party at the Obolensky's. Sunday next we are invited to a party at Count Tolstoy's with dancing afterwards, and that night there is to be a dance at the Golitzin's again.

PUSHKIN: I will not oblige myself to attend. There is nothing for it but to doze or gorge myself on ices.

NATALYA: But you must see M. Naryshkin's serf orchestra. Each serf plays but a single note, each time it occurs. And so each man is simply called by the name of his note: do, ra, mi, fa, so, la, te do. Don't you think It's divine?

PUSHKIN: I have no interest in serf orchestras or in any of the other idiocies in which you and that mindless crowd of yours indulges.

NATALYA: I'm going.

PUSHKIN: Be careful, do you hear me?

NATALYA: What are you talking about ?

PUSHKIN: You know very well what I am talking about. You rejoice in the fact that that those dogs run after you, as they would a bitch, raising their tails as straight as pipes and sniffing at your ass.

NATALYA: You're being crude and mean.

PUSHKIN: I have watched long enough while that horseguardsman, D'Anthes, pursues you from the Obolenskys' to the Golitzins', from ball to ball, soirée to soirée. You are my wife, although I am not sure that fact has ever occurred to you.

NATALYA: I have been faithful to you!

PUSHKIN: Yes, you are faithful. You yield to my embraces as one who is dead. You dance until dawn, sleep until noon, and then off once more. But yes, you are faithful. Of what use is your faithless faith?

NATALYA: What do you want of me?

PUSHKIN: You will stay away from D'Anthès. You will stay away from the Tzar.

NATALYA: The Tzar? Surely you can't think __

PUSHKIN: You will act as a wife! Do you understand me?

NATALYA: (Running out of the room) I'm going.

PUSHKIN: My wife has bore me four children. Does she recognize the fact? No. She leaves them to the nurse's care while she dashes about like a...a debutante. Does she catch the tiniest glimmer of what she is doing? Never. She gleans nothing besides sparkling gowns. ...Forgive her, she has no mind; you understood as much when you married her. Damnit, even a holy fool should understand fidelity. And honor. Does she have no conception of honor? A ridiculous question; she conceives only children. Why did I marry her? Was I under some youthful delusion that I loved her? After all, I was turning thirty. The afternoon of life had set in; I had to acknowledge it. Ah, what an idiot I was...And yet, I was happy.

(PUSHKIN's SERVANT NIKITA ushers in COUNT VLADIMIR

ALEKSANDROVICH SOLUGUB, who is about 22.)

SOLOGUB: Pushkin.

PUSHKIN: Yes, what is it Count?

SOLOGUB: (Nervously) Let me be direct. I I have here a letter which was delivered in the post this morning. They are being sent all over St. Petersburg; I have made a few inquires. I thought I had better show it to you. (He hands PUSHKIN the letter)

PUSHKIN: (Reading aloud) "The Chevaliers of the First Degree, Commanders and Chevaliers of the Most Serene Order of Cuckolds, gathered in full assembly under the presidency of the Grand Master of the Order, his excellency, M. Naryshkin, have unanimously elected M. Aleksandr Pushkin coadjutor to the Grand Master of the Order of Cuckolds and historiographer of the Order—Count J. Borch, Perpetual Secretary."

(Trying to contain his rage)

This is an insult to my wife. But you realize it is impossible for me to take offense at an anonymous letter. If anyone spat on my coat, it would be my valet who would clean it off, not I. My wife is an angel; she is above suspicion.

SOLOGUB: She may be above suspicion but the horseguardsman is not. He pursues her relentlessly. Aleksandr Sergeyevich, if I may be so bold, the affair is becoming a scandal. Petersburg talks of nothing else.

(PUSHKIN goes to his desk and scrawls a note)

PUSHKIN: Here, take this to the Dutch Ambassador.

SOLUGUB: Heechkeren?

PUSHKIN: You know who I mean: the illegitimate father of that bastard D'Anthès.

SOLUGUB: May I inquire...?

PUSHKIN: A challenge. We will watch that decrepit white-haired hag flinch when his fair horseman is unsaddled. Please give me his response immediately.

(Exit SOLOGUB)

PUSHKIN: (Now in full fury. He examines the paper under a lamp) Who is responsible for this filth? It can only be Heechkeren; look at the foreign paper. The secret police would know; their eyes follow the post microscopically. I am well aware. But will they tell? No, they would be pleased to see me made ridiculous. They would be pleased to see me dead. Nikolai, the Tzar himself is likely responsible. No doubt he put Heeckeren up to it just to rid himself of my annoying pen. Well, he will see how annoying my pen can be. He will see who is made ridiculous. If revolutions and exiles cannot stop me, do they think their puny efforts can? I will punish them for their insolence. Heechkeren will be destroyed, as will his fop of a son. I swear to God.

(He collapses into a chair. Time passes. Several days. Lights may fade. Enter

SOLOGUB.)

PUSHKIN: (Looking up) Well? You have been running back and forth for three days now. What is the outcome?

SOLOGUB: It is completely settled. We have concluded negotiations with the Ambassador. D'Anthès has agreed to marry your sister-in-law, Catherine. Your jealousy has blinded you –you did not realize that D'Anthès was after

your sister-in-law all the time. He just used Natalya as an excuse to get closer to his true goal. The family alliance is desirable. All will be well. Everyone is happy. A catastrophe has been averted. D'Anthès has asked permission to call on you.

PUSHKIN: (Jumping up) He will never set foot in this house!

(Exit PUSHKIN in fury)

SOLUGUB: Ah, if Natalya, or D'Anthes;, or even Pushkin had shown a bit of sense a year ago, the entire affair would never have amounted to a row of pins.

(Exit SOLUGUB. Lights fade. Enter STEPHANIE and NATALYA) STEPHANIE: Quite a scene. You have all my sympathy. (She curtseys)

NATALYA: Oh, thank you but...I think It's too late for that.

STEPHANIE: Why?

NATALYA: I don't understand Pushkin at all...What does he expect me to do, sit home all day while he writes? I do so love to dance. (She whirls)

STEPHANIE: If you wished to stop this you could.

NATALYA: Stop what?

STEPHANIE: You know very well what I mean.

NATALYA: Do I? I saw you with your mathematician - is that what he is? Quite a game you played.

STEPHANIE: I beg your pardon, Madame.

NATALYA: You know very well what I am talking about.

STEPHANIE: I most certainly don't.

NATALYA: I do so love to dance. If you'll excuse me.

(Exit NATALYA)

STEPHANIE: Are we all so ambiguous?

(Exit STEPHANIE)

ACT THREE

Scene Four

A simple, unadorned room. It is perhaps a room in a nursing home. Some of GALOIS' manuscripts sit on a small table. It is dimly lit. Outside it is night. GALOIS and CHEVALIER are talking.

GALOIS: Do you know, Auguste, there is a certain pleasure in being sad, if one can hope for the consolation of friends.

CHEVALIER: I am your friend, Evariste.

GALOIS: I know. You come like an an apostle of grace, always supporting me when I need you. You cannot know what that means to me. But your efforts are for nothing...I am so...I cannot explain. (Bitterly) I would like to erase every emotion I have experienced within the last month. I would like to expunge the present from my existence. I would like -

CHEVALIER: Let me take you from here, Evariste. You need to rest, to... meditate. Come with me to Menilmontant and meet Father Enfantin.

GALOIS: Your solutions are always so simple and, yet, I fail to understand them.

CHEVALIER: Perhaps I am a simpleton, Evariste, but I have found that which you need: peace.

GALOIS: Beloved simpleton, you have found peace, and pity. I have found neither. In a single month, I have exhausted the greatest source of happiness a man can experience. It is drained for life.

CHEVALIER: No, I cannot believe it. Certainly, the greatest source of happiness can only be yourself, to be at peace with yourself. I am not one to laugh at your unhappiness, but there are those who would, aren't there? Aren't there men who would forget Stephanie after a day?

GALOIS: She deceived me!

CHEVALIER: Pity her, Evariste. She is only a foolish girl...a doctor's daughter. She deserves your pity. You must be left with some pity, I think...

GALOIS: All that is left now is hatred. There is no peace, no pity. Pity! Never. Hatred, that is all.

CHEVALIER: Evariste, you have been intoxicated by the putrefying filth of a rotten world. Your hands are soiled, and your head, and your heart.

GALOIS: How can a world I detest soil me?

CHEVALIER: I do pity you, my brother. If you remain in such a state, that which you love best, your work, will become impossible – perhaps forever.

GALOIS: Your kind words are cruel. They are cruel because there is truth in them. to continue seems...impossible...My heart rebels against my head –

CHEVALIER: (Reaching out) Evariste

GALOIS But I do not add, as you do, "It is a pity."

(CHEVALIER recoils)

You see, there is not even that conceit anymore.

(CHEVALIER buries his head in his hands)

Do not cry for me, Auguste. The situation is simple enough: There are those in this world destined to do good but never receive it. I am one of them.

CHEVALIER: That simply cannot be, Evariste.

(A knock at the door)

GALOIS: One moment, Auguste.

(GALOIS opens the door. At most, a shadowy form is seen in the entrance)

VOICE 1: M. Evariste Galois?

GALOIS: Yes, what is it.

VOICE 1: I see you have company. Will you please step outside?

(GALOIS exits. The following conversation is held just offstage)

VOICE 1: M. Galois, if you please, this is my second. I am also, in reciprocal agreement, to act as second for him.

GALOIS: Seconds. What are you talking about?

VOICE 1: M. Galois, we have come in an affair of honor.

(A long pause)

VOICE 2: You have slandered the name of a young woman.

GALOIS: Woman!

VOICE 2: She is my...cousin.

VOICE 1: And my fiancée.

GALOIS: But I recognize you You are Republicans, friends...

VOICE 1: Yes, what of it?

GALOIS: It is pointless to reduce an already small number.

VOICE 1: This, M. Galois, is not a political matter. You have compromised my relationship with a young woman.

GALOIS: I am innocent of your accusation. I had no idea you were the other party. How could there have been a compromise?

VOICE 1: Her reputation has been damaged and therefore my own. I demand satisfaction.

GALOIS: It is difficult to imagine how the reputation of such a...slut can be damaged.

VOICE 1: M. Galois, had I not already issued a challenge, those words would be enough to cause me to do so.

(Pause)

VOICE 2: We will be expecting your seconds in the morning, M. Galois. You know us and where to find us. We warn you, we will accept only one of two answers: swords or pistols. Good-evening.

(Footsteps away. Enter GALOIS)

GALOIS: (To himself) "I am sure some of your accomplices feared your presence more than they feared the police itself..." (A distinct pause) Who are they?

CHEVALIER: Evariste, I overheard. You will not go through with it, will you --?

GALOIS: (Absently) No, of course not. What are these forces which surround me? Like a cyclone they turn in. I do not see my way clear.

CHEVALIER: Come with me to Menilmontant. Evariste, my friend, I beg you for your life.

GALOIS: (Angrily) Will you never give up your attempts to convert me? God, what is happening here? Will these enemies forever hide from daylight? Out, cowards! Show your vile faces!

CHEVALIER: For your life, Evariste. Come to Menilmontant.

GALOIS: (More softly) Cowards!

CHEVALIER: For a third time, Evariste, I beg you for your life.

GALOIS: No, I will not come to Menilmontant. I am afraid I do not possess the stuff to make a good Christian.

CHEVALIER: I do not think you make a great martyr either, Evariste.

GALOIS: (Bitterly) Is it not the first step to becoming a great Christian?

CHEVALIER: I always thought you were a great genius. Remember at Louis-Le-Grand how M. Richard used to say you would become the greatest mathematician in all France?

GALOIS: I already am.

CHEVALIER: Then surely, Evariste, it must be easier to find a way out of this than to start a new branch of mathematics.

(GALOIS begins to gather up his papers)

CHEVALIER: Where are you going?

GALOIS: To find some seconds. Don't worry, my Auguste, I would not have even thought to ask.

CHEVALIER: Let me come with you!

GALOIS: No.

CHEVALIER: Will you tell your seconds to prevent this?

GALOIS: (Absently) Yes, don't worry.

(He turns to go)

CHEJALIER: Evariste?

GALOIS: Yes?

(CHEVALIER embraces him)

GALOIS: (Smiling) Au revoir.

(Exit GALOIS)

ACT THREE

Scene Five

NATALYA's parlor. NATALYA is sitting with her embroidery. Her NURSE is with her, arranging her hair for the night, or some such.

NURSE: Imagine, D'Anthès asking for your sister's hand so suddenly. It's quite a surprise isn't it?

NATALYA: Please, Nanny, I don't want to talk about it.

NURSE: Akh, Natasha, my ears, though old, still hear occasionally. I really don't know what all the fuss is about. All the young men flirt these days. Kissing, holding hands...It's just the fashion.

NATALYA: Nanny, I beg you, please stop. It is more than just flirting. I...I don't know what I've done. I don't understand anything of what's happening... I...I think I love him...No, it was just pretend...I want to go to bed now.

(Enter PUSHKIN in a rage. He waves the NURSE out of the room. She exits.)

PUSHKIN: (Waving a letter in the air)Natalya, what does this mean? D'Anthès is engaged to your very sister and he still dares -? Where have you been?

(He throws the letter down. NATALYA picks it up and reads it quickly)

NATALYA: Oh, Pushkin, it was a trap. I didn't know what was going to happen. I swear to God I am faithful. I swear it -

PUSHKIN: What happened!

NATALYA: Idalia Poletika asked me for a visit. D'Anthès was there. I wasn't expecting it, you must believe me. Idalia left us alone...Oh, why did she go? D'Anthès threatened to kill himself if I refused him...He had a pistol. He said he would shoot himself. What was I to do? I shouted at him. I said, "No, no, you are trying to blackmail me! I will never see you again!" Idalia came back because of the noise. I ran out. Nothing more happened, you must believe me. I have not betrayed you. Husband, I will kill myself if you do not believe me.

PUSHKIN: Who overheard? Who sent this letter?

NATALYA: I don't know, Pushkin, I don't know.

PUSHKIN: Does no one ever know anything? Out, invisible enemies, out! Where are you?

NATALYA: Please forgive me. I know I cannot love you as you wish, but I have been faithful. *Prostí menyá, prostí* (Прости меня, прости.)

(PUSHKIN leaves her and calls for his SERVANT)

PUSHKIN: Nikita! Come here at once!

(Enter SERVANT)

PUSHKIN: Call Count Sologub. Tell him to come here immediately. There is not time. Immediately.

(Exit NIKITA. PUSHKIN begins to write a letter, scribbles, tears it up, writes more, all in a fury. Enter SOLUGUB.)

PUSHKIN: Ah, my dear Sologub. Please take this letter to the Ambassador. But read it first. I want you to know what is in it.

SOLOGUB: (Reading) "You will permit me to say, M. Baron, that your role in this affair has not been the most proper. You, the big-wig representative of a crowned head have acted as a fatherly pimp for your mongrel son...Like a debauched old woman you have spied on my wife in all corners to tell her of your son's love. And while he is at home on medicine, sick with syphilis, you tell her he is dying of love for her. 'Give me back my son,' you babble..." Aleksandr Sergeyeovich, you know this letter can bring only one result.

PUSHKIN: Will you act as my second?

SOLOGUB: I should like to know the cause.

PUSHKIN: What? Not three months ago, you offered to be my second if the need should arise. You know all the details. Why do you hesitate now?

SOLOGUB: I have learned the details, yes, that is true. I have not found the cause.

PUSHKIN: What do you mean? I do not understand. Would you stand by to have your honor smeared -?

SOLOGUB: Honor, that is precisely the point. I have heard much talk of something called honor in these last months. It is a sticky business with you, isn't it? A year ago, you even challenged *me* to a duel over your wife's honor.

PUSHKIN: It was a...a trifle.

SOLOGUB: I trifle I apologized for, in writing. Thank God, I was not so stupid as to go through with it. You would have.

PUSHKIN: This is entirely different. There is the question of fidelity.

SOLOGUB: Fidelity, yes. I have recently heard much talk of this fidelity also. And jealousy. The air seems to be buzzing with them. about them. I have yet to hear any talk of love. Do you love your wife, Aleksandr Sergeyevich?

PUSHKIN: What possesses you to ask such a question? Of course I do.

SOLOGUB: Only your rage is convincing. She is a porcelain doll, Pushkin. She has hardly more wit than an eight-year old; you have said as much yourself. Your pride has been hurt because your doll has been muddied. Is it worth your life?

PUSHKIN: You have no right to ask me these questions! Look at me. I am shaking with fever. I cannot seem to get warm.

SOLOGUB: Aleksandr –

PUSHKIN: No, I am all right. God, it is stifling in here. Will you act as my second or not?

SOLOGUB: Not until I have my answer.

PUSHKIN: You have no right! My life is my own.

SOLOGUB: I have the right and, indeed, the responsibility. You are the greatest poet in all Russia. I say it not out of flattery; I say it out of fact. You know it, Russia knows it, perhaps the world knows it. But the horseguardsman does not know it and your poetry will not stop his ball of lead from smashing your skull in two. Come tomorrow, your sweet words will be absent as eulogy. And neither scented tapers nor the cologne sprinkled on your forehead will

disguise the nauseating stench of your decaying entrails. Yes, if that is about to happen, I want a cause.

PUSHKIN: What makes you think, Count, that because I am a great man my feelings are free for public consumption? What makes you so certain my feelings are any different from those of lesser men?

SOLOGUB: I would never make the mistake of calling you a great man. Unfortunately, someday you will be revered as such. I have not the slightest doubt future scholars will trace your every footstep: "On this day in 1837, Pushkin ate cabbage soup." Each scrap of your handwriting will become a great treasure and each word will be examined under a magnifying lens for inspiration. It really is a pity that poet and man will become hopelessly confused. The greatest of poets, yes. You will sit on Parnassus with Shakespeare, Homer, Dante. Do not fear you will be left out. But if you were a great man, you would see your way clear of this idiocy. Yet, you refuse to even open your eyes. Tell me, I beg of you one favor: tell me at least why you married Natalya.

PUSHKIN: I had wanted to go abroad but permission was denied me. I did not know what else to do, so I decided to get married.

SOLOGUB: I am sorry, Aleksandr Sergeyeovich, I cannot be your second. Forgive me; I know I have spoken too much.

(Exit SOLOGUB. After a moment of silence, PUSHKIN collects his coat and some manuscripts.)

PUSHKIN: Ah, it is stifling in here. I must get some air.

(Exit PUSHKIN.)

ACT THREE

Scene Six:

Same setting as Act I, Scene I but now with two tables, one at each corner of the stage. A lamp stands on each table, unlit. Enter PUSHKIN and GALOIS. They collide.

GALOIS: Pardon.

PUSHKIN: *Proshú prosheniyá* (Прошу прощения)

GALOIS: Oh, it's you again.

PUSHKIN: None other. Whom did you expect?

GALOIS: I feel like a rat in a maze. Several times we've set off –

PUSHKIN: – only to end up at the start. Well, you didn't take my advice.

GALOIS: Nor you mine.

PUSHKIN: So it goes. There is still time.

GALOIS: Unlikely...Tell me, did you care for her?

PUSHKIN: I think at one time I honestly did, but somehow the care got lost in the rest. I can't seem to find it now.

GALOIS: I can't seem to find it now. We're repeating ourselves.

PUSHKIN: Yes....It's a bad business fighting duels in such morose humor. We'd better cheer you up.

GALOIS: Fire away.

PUSHKIN: This should do it:

Ya pámyatnik sebyé vozdvíg nerukotvórny,

K nemú ne zarastyót narodnaya tropá.

Voznyóssya vyéshe on glavóiu nepokórnoi

Aleksandrískovo stolpá.

Nyet, vés' ya ne umrú – dushá v zavétnoi lírye

Moi prax perezhivyót i tlén'ya ubezhít --

I sláven búdu ya, dokól' b nodlúnnom mírye

Zhiv búdyet xot' odín piit.*

GALOIS: It's very beautiful, but you'll have to translate it. I'm afraid it's in the wrong language.

PUSHKIN: Easily enough done. I'll give you a rough version:

I have raised a monument -to myself not built by hands,

The people's path to it will not be overgrown.

It's rebellious head towering higher than the Alexandrian spire.

GALOIS: I tell you, no one seems to be beating a path to my monument. Even the academicians ignore it. Fools, can't they tell a monument when they see one?

-
- Я памятник себе воздвиг неркотворный,
К нему не зарастёт народная тропа.
Вознёсся выше он главою непокорный
Александрийского столпа.
Нет весь я не умру-душа в заветной лире
Мой прах переживёт и тленья убежит-
И славен буду я, доколь в подлунном мире
Жив будет хоть один пиит.

PUSHKIN: Well, if poetry makes us immortal, why don't you read me some of yours.

GALOIS: I already have...*L'eternal cypress m'environne* -

PUSHKIN: No, your real poetry of course. Your mathematics.

GALOIS: (Brightening) All right. I have found, among other things, the following theorem: For an irreducible equation of prime degree to be solvable by radicals, it is necessary and sufficient that all its roots be rational functions of any two of them.

PUSHKIN: You'll have to translate. I'm afraid it's in the wrong language.

GALOIS: I have discovered the general conditions under which an algebraic equation is solvable. I have done this by using the theory of groups. If the term is unfamiliar, you are forgiven, as I coined it myself. As far as I know, it is the first full investigation of groups, for which - there is no doubt - M. Cauchy will receive credit.

PUSHKIN: Is that an irony?

GALOIS: No, just bitterness. Do you know, poet, I might well be a pitiable carnival geek who bites off the heads of screaming chickens, or one of those astounding characters who can flare a match by breaking wind. But there is a difference: they can make a living; their style of madness wins public approval. So does yours. To you, the people beat a path, to me

PUSHKIN: Not as clear cut as all that, mathematician. The Tzar, my personal censor, you'll recall, deigned to read my *Boris Godunov*. He said, via his Chief of Secret Police, "I feel that M. Pushkin would have achieved his purpose if,

after a careful weeding out, he had transformed his play into a novelette or historical romance in the manner of Walter-Scott." It has yet to be performed.

GALOIS: You complain overly much. But it is nice to be reminded I am not the only one the police watches. Do you know, my mind makes so many connections. They tell me I am a great mathematician because I see patterns no one else sees. But I see other patterns as well. I see enemies. I turn to confront them, reach out to strike and – nothing. They have vanished. I see police agents following me. I begin to wonder if I have no been set up for this duel and – No, I make myself ridiculous. It cannot be. My mind forges too many connections altogether.

PUSHKIN: I for one consider it an honor that the police watch us.

GALOIS: Why?

PUSHKIN: Allow me to finish the poem. You'll like the last two stanzas better; there is no doubt.

And long will I be loved by the people,
Whose feelings by my lyre I awakened,
That in this cruel age I praised Freedom
And mercy for the fallen pled.

GALOIS: Then what went wrong?

PUSHKIN: Your command, O muse, will be heeded:

Do not fear offense, do not laurels demand,

Praise and criticism accept with equanimity,

And do not argue with the fool.

GALOIS: That's where we went wrong.

PUSHKIN: I don't follow.

GALOIS: We argued with the fool, and I'm not sure the fool wasn't us. (Rising) Well, I must be going. I have many things to write down tonight. My brain is teeming with unwritten works and I am afraid this will be my last chance.

PUSHKIN: I too must be off. A ball to attend. Ugh. I wish you luck. How old did you say you were?

GALOIS: I haven't said. I am twenty.

PUSHKIN: I fought a duel when I was twenty. And I'm still alive at thirty-seven. Don't be so gloomy.

GALOIS: (Trying to be cheerful) You know, we might have been friends.

PUSHKIN: We might have. (Aside) But God knows, it's too late now.

GALOIS: (Turning away) Adieu.

PUSHKIN: (Sadly) *Proshai*. (Прощай)

(The two part company and walk to opposite corners of the stage where two tables stand.

They light the lamps which sit on the tables. The CHIME here should be a low C. The

music (optional) is from Stokowski's Symphonic Synthesis of Boris Godunov. The part

used starts 2:33 before the end of the with the pianissimo entrance of the woodwinds. The

three chimes indicated at the end of the scene may be omitted if this recording is used, as

they are on the recording itself.)

GALOIS: So much to do...so little time. A pistol. I must get a pistol. No, that can wait. Do they think they can stop me with a ball of lead? Do they think they can stop me with their odious lies? Lies. It is not possible to lie. Calm down, Evariste, you have work to do, much work to do. (He sits and begins writing.)

PUSHKIN: So, the sun has set, the moon has risen, and I have returned from another ball. If I am lucky there shall be no more of them. (Finding a note) What's this? They want me to provide seconds? Impossible; they know a second's first duty is to attempt a reconciliation. Complications, always complications. Never mind, that can wait. There is work to be done. I had best make selections for the next issue of *The Contemporary*. Cornwall's *Dramatic Scenes* might do nicely. I'll send them off to Mme. Ishimova for translation. Oh, I had better send her my regrets that I will not be able to visit her in person.

GALOIS: Ah, Poisson here again: "The proof of this lemma is not sufficient. But it is true according to Lagrange's paper, No.100., Berlin 1775." So, M. Professor, my proof is not sufficient? I shall fight a small, bloodless duel (PUSHKIN begins here) with M. Poisson.

PUSHKIN: Too many duels for one day. What a bore! Tomorrow, we shall trudge through the snow, with shivering hands load our pistols and - what? A misfire. There is not the slightest doubt.

GALOIS: (Writing) This proof is a textual transcription of one given by us in a paper of last year. We leave here as an historic document the note which M. Poisson conceived it to be his duty to insert.

PUSHKIN: I wonder if the critics will find it their duty to tear asunder Cornwall's *Scenes* as they did my *Boris*. Where are the sacred unites, they ask? They demand a probability of events, of places, of times. They have altogether tried to base the laws of drama, as one would base the laws of the universe, on probability. But what the devil is there of probability in an auditorium cut in two, one part of which is occupied by two thousand people who appear not to be seen by those on stage. History will judge what is probable and what is not.

GALOIS: A few things need to be completed in this proof. (He breaks off writing and stands up in anguish) There is not the time!

CHIME: Clang!

GALOIS: The minutes tick past and I stare into an open grave. God, would I run up that steeple clock and force back the hands. Would I freely abandon all gifts for that one - to be in control of time.

CHIME: Clang!

GALOIS: Someone must remember me. There must be more to my life than eight months under the bar and a despicable slut. Someone must know. ...My friends....My dear friends, I have been provoked by two patriots and it is impossible for me to refuse. I beg your forgiveness for not having told you

but my adversaries have put me on my honor not to inform any patriot.

Your task is simple: prove that I am fighting against my will having exhausted all possible means of reconciliation; say whether I am capable of lying even in the most trivial matters. Please remember me since fate did not give me enough of a life that I should be remembered by my country. I die your friend.

CHIME: Clang!

PUSHKIN: But what if there is no misfire? There will be no cherries this time, Pushkin. My *History of Peter the Great* will go unfinished. I have barely begun it. Natalya, will she marry D'Anthès? How can she? She is already married. It is a ridiculous thought altogether. My children, what will they do? Pushkin, how have you gotten yourself into this situation? No, do not think of it; you have years ahead.

CHIME: Clang!

GALOIS: I say nothing, less than nothing. How can I give them my life on a piece of paper? Patriots and friends, I beg you to forgive me that in dying, I do not die for my country. I die the victim of an infamous coquette and her two dupes. It is in a miserable piece of slander than my life is extinguished. Oh! Why die for something so little, so reprehensible? I call on heaven to witness that I have tried to avert this provocation by every means. It is only under force that I concede. I repent in having told the hateful truth to those who could not listen to it with dispassion. But to the end, I told the truth. I go to

the grave with a conscience free from patriots' blood. Adieu! I would have liked to have given my life for the public good. Forgive them who kill me, for they are of good faith.

CHIME: Clang!

PUSHKIN: My God, Pushkin, do you go to the tomb with so little argument? Are you so happy to give up life? Happiness...I have never bothered much about happiness; I could always get along without it well enough. Now that I need it so desperately, where am I to find it? (Calling) Natalya! No, she is at a ball. Anna Kern! My K! A ghost by now. Jeaneau! Where are your sleighhells?

(A silence)

Jeaneau!

(Another silence)

Jeaneau! Let us be companions once again, as in the old days. We will saddle up our horses for riding in the fields; we will careen down the streets of Petersburg in carriages laden with rum and brazen young women. We will turn back the clock yet, Jeaneau!

CHIME: Clang!

GALOIS: No, I tell them too much. Why should I join history swallowed in the same muck as everyone else? Where are her letters? (He finds a letter) Strike her name. There, she is obliterated. A phantom. My opponents. (Striking their names) There. Now they are nothing. The cause? It is erased. No one will ever know. History will judge me as an achievement; the man will be wiped

clean. Now I am purified, free at last. I will write to Auguste. (He sits to write)

Mon Cher Ami - I have made some new discoveries in analysis.* The first concern the theory of equations, the others integral functions. In the theory of equations, I have researched the conditions for their solvability by radicals. All this was done in three memoires. The first is written and, in spite of what Poisson has said, I support it, with the corrections I have made. These second contains very interesting applications of the theory of equations. Here is a resumé of the most important results.

PUSHKIN: Jeaneau, Have you read my *Bronze Horseman*? I shall travel to Siberia to present you a copy myself. I am sure you will love it; it is one of my greatest works:

Na beregú pustínnix voln

*Stoyál on, dum velíkix poln...**

My hero, Evgeny, has spoken against the Tzar. Peter's Statue -yes, the great bronze one in Senate Square -- comes to life and pursues him throughout the streets of Petersburg. You will hear the hoof beats clattering against the cobblestones, unrelenting, clack-clack, clack-clack, clack-clack. All night Evgeny is pursued, never allowed a moment's rest, clack-clack, clack-clack...It is not a happy ending.

* One of the greatest understatements of all time. To be read with the greatest pathos.

- На берегу, пустинных волн
Стоял он, дум великих полн...

GALOIS: I want you to know, Auguste, that these subjects were not the only ones I have explored. My principal meditations for some time have been on the application of transcendental analysis to the theory of....ambiguities...

PUSHKIN: Evgeny; there is more than one Evgeny, isn't there? And now, advance! Ho, ho. I will not give away that rhyme. Strike it from your mind Pushkin. Be cheerful. Smile, there is nothing to worry about. Where is your legendary smile? Here (He calls as if calling a cat) smile, come on...Yes, I have it. I will write a poem called "the Fourteenth of December." I will write about how we, on Senate Square, were mowed down by the Tzar's troops. We, Pushkin? You missed it.

CHIME: Clang!

GALOIS: ...But I have not the time and my ideas are not fully developed on this terrain, which is immense. I have often dared in my life to advance propositions about which I was not sure. But all I have written here has been clear in my mind for a year, and it is much in my own interest not to leave myself open to the suspicion that I announce results of which I do not have complete proof.

PUSHKIN: Are you paralyzed, Pushkin? Write! You have fought hundreds of duels before. Well, at least dozens. Well, at least a few. How is this different? Is this any cause for your pen to dry up? March off to Siberia. Join your friends before it is too late. Happiness can still be yours. Siberia over marriage, take it! What pointless musings, Pushkin. Calm down. Go to sleep.

(Music from *Boris Godunov* in here)

GALOIS: Make a public request of Jacobi or Gauss to give his opinion, not as to the truth, but as to the importance of these theorems. After that, I hope some men may find it profitable to sort out this mess. I embrace you with effusion
-Evariste Galois.

(He cries himself to sleep)

(BORIS crescendo during following)

PUSHKIN: "And now advance!" Strike it from your mind, Pushkin. You wrote it ten years past. It can have no bearing...the old woman. Yes, this is her doing. She predicted it all; she caused it to be. No, you cannot believe it. Tomorrow, I will not budge. I shall not allow tomorrow to arrive at all. I say time shall halt!

(Brass entrance here)

I refuse to play the part of the buffoon even for God himself! I refuse to play the part of the buffoon even for Pushkin himself!

(BORIS climax here)

(Tam-tam) "And now, advance!"

With blood running cold,

Still not aiming,

The two enemies approach,

Firmly, quietly, precisely,

Four steps taken beyond the line,

(Bass) Four deadly steps.
till not halting,
His, pistol then, Evgeny raises
Five steps more, five footsteps in the snow.
And Lensky, his left eye upcast,
Begins to aim - But Onegin shoots.

(Violins, celli)
The fatal hour is past;
The poet silently drops his pistol.
On his breast, he quietly lays his hand
And falls...

(Optional) There, you have your rhyme.

(PUSHKIN puts out the lamp and exits)

GALOIS: (Awakening) Sunrise! It is time to go.

(GALOIS puts out his lamp and exits)

(THREE CHIMES)

CURTAIN